US court allows Jimenez to post $500,000 bail

Story Below, COLUMN I

PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

2 Campos murder eyewitnesses in hiding

By Christian V. Esguerra

IT'S A TOUGH one for the Parañaque City police.

Supt. Wency Pascual, officer-in-charge of the investigation of the brutal murder of Chief Insp. John Campos, said that depending on who's talking, Chief Supt. Reynaldo Berroya, Mary "Rosebud" Ong or Antonio Ca-

2 CAMPOS/ A4

8 dead, 28 wounded in Tacurong bombing

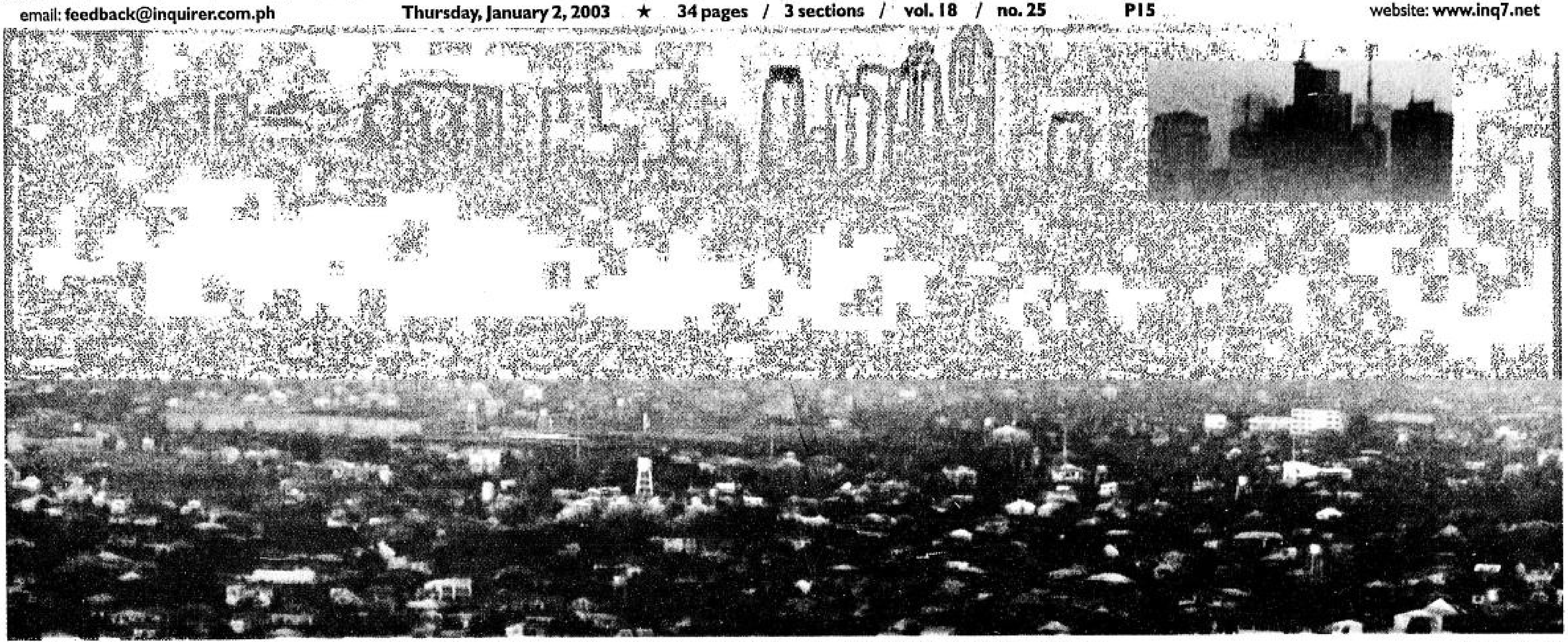
By Aquiles Z. Zonio
and Jeffrey M. Tupas
PDI Mindanao Bureau

TACURONG CITY, Sultan Kudarat—All they wanted was to welcome the new year with a blast. They ended up dead or wounded.

Eight persons, including a 9-year-old boy, were killed while 28 others were

8 DEAD/ A4

email: feedback@inquirer.com.ph Thursday, January 2, 2003 ★ 34 pages / 3 sections / vol. 18 / no. 25 P15 website: www.inq7.net



THE DAWNING of the first day of the Year 2003 upon a smoke-choked, woozy Metro Manila is viewed from the hills of Antipolo, Rizal, at 6:47 a.m.

DENNIS SABANGAN

FVR emerging Lakas bet

ROMANCING a rare moment of togetherness, away from it all in the City of Pines where the President and her husband have been on holiday.

MALACAÑANG PHOTO

Question: Is Ramos qualified to run again?

By Rocky Nazareno
and Vincent Cabreza,
PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

WITH President Macapagal-Arroyo declaring herself out of the presidential stakes, could this signal the return of the tobacco-chomping Fidel V. Ramos to national politics?

This is one of the possible 2004 scenarios being advanced by Ramos partisans in the ruling Lakas-NUCD whose leadership has reportedly started to skim through the party ranks in search of the important someone to carry the party standard in the next presidential elections.

"We're sifting through the ranks, looking for someone who could replace Ms Macapagal as the party's standard bearer for 2004," said a Lakas official who requested anonymity.

And this early, the name of the 74-year-old Ramos, who was President from 1992 to 1998, has cropped up not a few times as the possible party choice.

The Lakas source noted that Ramos' record "speaks very well for itself."

"The country experienced leaps and bounds in development during his time," the source said, pointing out that it was during Ramos' time that the peso hit P25 to $1, "an all-time high in years."

Davao Rep. Joel Mayo Almario said party stalwarts were "strongly pushing" for Ramos to be the

FVR/ A4

NEW YEAR'S EVE TOLL

DOH, PNP say revelers' injuries decreased

WHEN will they ever learn? The injured fingers of 10-year-old Janine Bernardo are treated at the Jose Reyes Memorial Hospital in Manila.

RANDY HORMILLOSA

By Armand N. Nocum,
TJ Burgonio and PDI Bureaus

BY ALMOST a third, the number of firecracker injuries on New Year's Eve dropped partly as a result of Filipinos getting more safety conscious.

The Department of Health said yesterday that the number of people who suffered firecracker injuries dropped 27 percent to 380 from 524 last year.

"Our campaign against the sale and lighting of illegal firecrackers and indiscriminate firing was very successful. We feel that this paid off," said Senior Supt. Leopoldo Bataoil, spokesperson of the Philippine National Police (PNP).

"Although we cannot get firecrackers out of our system, people are clearly staying away from the type of pyrotechnics that injure or kill,"

DOH/ A4

US group fears a lame-duck GMA

By Jennie L. Ilustre
PDI Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON, DC—If the United States, preoccupied as it is with preparations for an impending war with Iraq, is concerned about President Macapagal-Arroyo's decision not to contest the 2004 election, it did not show it.

A State Department official issued a diplomatic response, saying Ms Macapagal's decision "will have no impact on the excellent relations between the US and the Philippines or with the Macapagal-Arroyo administration."

"We look forward to working with President Arroyo and the Philippine government to meet the challenges and opportunities of the New Year," the official said.

Both the State Department and the Pentagon treated the decision as a Philippine domestic issue.

US GROUP/ A3

Fil-American named LA county judge

By Martin P. Marfil

A FILIPINO lawyer established a record of sorts in the United States when he was appointed to the Los Angeles County Superior Court as a judge, becoming the first Filipino named to the judicial branch in 16 years.

"I am extremely honored and humbled to have been appointed

FIL-AMERICAN/ A3

US court grants Jimenez $500,000 bail

Manila lawmaker dressed in prison garb, shackled, handcuffed

MANILA Rep. Mark Jimenez received a welcome present on his birthday on Tuesday—he was granted a $500,000 bail (about P25 million) by a US judge on charges of tax evasion and making illegal campaign contributions to US politicians.

But the controversial lawmaker, who avoided arrest by voluntarily leaving for the United States last week to face the charges, will be under 24-hour house arrest in south Florida.

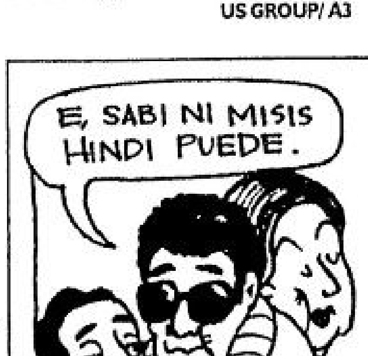
Jimenez, who turned 56 on Tuesday, shuffled into the Miami federal courtroom dressed in olive prison garb, shackled at the ankles and handcuffed to another prisoner.

Like Charlie "Atong" Ang, a fugitive from Philippine justice who is under the custody of US authorities, Jimenez will be fitted with an electronic bracelet to prevent him from leaving Florida until his trial on 47 counts of tax evasion, wire fraud and illegal campaign contributions.

Asked if Jimenez could meet the bond conditions, defense lawyer Abbe Lowell said: "I hope so. I think so, (but) not today."

But Rep. Prospero Pichay, who flew to Miami to lend his colleague moral support, claimed that Jimenez would be sprung from jail today after his lawyers and his family have complied

US COURT/ A3



Susan does not want FPJ to run

By Vincent Cabreza
PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

ACTRESS Susan Roces has put her foot down against her husband, Fernando Poe Jr., joining the presidential race in 2004.

This was according to

SUSAN/ A4

E-mail: pr_news@inquirer.com.ph

WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Eastern section of Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao will experience mostly cloudy skies with scattered rainshowers. The rest of the country will have partly cloudy to cloudy skies with isolated rainshowers.

SOURCE: PAGASA

COMPILED BY: RAY LEYESA, PDI RESEARCH/01/02/03

Metro Manila	Partly Cloudy	Iloilo/Bacolod	Cloudy with Rains
Baguio	Partly Cloudy	Roxas	Cloudy with Rains
Tuguegarao	Cloudy with Rains	Cebu	Cloudy with Rains
Laoag	Partly Cloudy	Tacloban	Cloudy with Rains
Clark Zone	Partly Cloudy	Gen. Santos	Cloudy with Rains
Tagaytay	Partly Cloudy	Zamboanga	Cloudy with Rains
Legazpi	Cloudy with Rains	Cagayan de Oro	Cloudy with Rains
Calapan	Partly Cloudy	Davao	Cloudy with Rains

Gloria's decision leaves 'other' party in limbo

By Norman Bordadora

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo's party vehicle, the Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi), admitted yesterday it would need to review its position and rethink its plans following her decision not to run in 2004.

"If the President has decided to remain apolitical, then we would have to re-assess our position," said Kampi president and the President's former publicist, Dante Ang.

"It's sad but we have to respect her decision," said Ang in a telephone interview.

"We would still support her all the way. We would do what she tells us to do," said Ang, hinting that the party's fledgling machinery would support whomever Ms Macapagal would choose to be her successor.

Kampi was reorganized in June to prepare for Ms Macapagal's presidential bid in 2004.

Ang was elected party president and former Tarlac Rep. Jose "Peping" Cojuangco party chair.

ANG

COJUANGCO

The party even recruited business magnate Herman Montenegro as chief fund raiser. Montenegro is the father-in-law of the President's son, Pampanga Vice Gov. Mikey Arroyo.

Businessman Edgardo Espiritu, a former finance secretary, also came on board as party treasurer.

There had been no word of any changes in Kampi's roster of officers since the reorganization.

Kampi was the political vehicle that catapulted the President to the vice presidency in 1998.

It became almost moribund after the President joined the Lakas-NUCD and became one of its chairs.

Ang said that the President's decision not to contest the 2004 elections has strengthened rather than weakened the position of the ruling coalition.

"She is still the rallying symbol of the coalition and the country. With her decision to set aside politics, the coalition became more attractive for some members of the opposition," Ang said.

Ang gave as an example the praises heaped on the President by opposition leaders after she announced her decision to withdraw.

"How can they go against a President that has called on the country's leaders to set aside politics?" he said.

"In effect, the administration has gotten stronger," he said.

Perez's fate still hangs; Cabinet revamp urged

By Dona Pazzibugan, *in Manila* and Vincent Cabreza, *Northern Luzon Bureau*

MALACAÑANG continues to be mum on the fate of Justice Secretary-on leave Hernando Perez as President Macapagal-Arroyo was leaning toward canceling her promised policy speech on Jan. 6, where she is expected to announce major reforms and more Cabinet changes.

Perez's 30-day leave was supposed to end on Dec. 26, but the President extended it by "two to four weeks." The justice secretary was told to go on leave after Manila Rep. Mark Jimenez accused him of extorting $2 million from him.

Presidential spokesperson Rigoberto Tiglao said yesterday the President was thinking of postponing or even totally doing away with her Jan. 6 speech. "Because of her Dec. 30 speech, she's still evaluating whether such a speech would be necessary or if it should be postponed," he said.

Tiglao said Ms Macapagal wanted to fine-tune the administration's programs first. "Everyone's framework changed (after) her announcement that she's not running anymore (in 2004)," Tiglao said.

'Unity Cabinet'

If Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. had his way, Sen. Edgardo Angara would be in the Cabinet. Angara, who lost as former President Joseph Estrada's running mate candidate in 1998, was Estrada's last executive secretary.

De Venecia's endorsement of Angara to the Cabinet was part of his proposed "Unity Cabinet" which, he said, should also include someone from the Left.

He said the Left had been invited to take part in "unification" governance, which he and Ms Macapagal drew up several months before her decision to withdraw from the 2004 elections.

De Venecia said civil rights lawyer Romeo Capulong, counsel of the National Democratic Front (NDF), had discussed with him the Left's likely representative to the Cabinet.

The Speaker said he had also asked the Nationalist Peoples' Coalition (NPC) and the opposition Partido ng Masang Pilipino (PMP) to endorse their representatives to the Cabinet.

'Wide-ranging'

Two lawmakers pressed the President to immediately reorganize her Cabinet so that she could pursue the reforms she wanted.

Davao City Rep. Prospero Nograles said a "wide-ranging Cabinet reorganization" should be made by the President to start the New Year right.

In a statement, Nograles said Ms Macapagal should let go of Cabinet members who were "non-performing" as well as those "saddled with scandals."

Leyte Rep. Ted Failon also sought a "sweeping" Cabinet revamp "so that only those who had no agenda other than to help the government will remain in the administration."

In a separate statement, Failon urged the President to dismiss Cabinet members who had been appointed "because of their potential to deliver votes for her in 2004" and keep those who were "committed to help pursue a results-oriented and corrupt-free government."

Workshop

At a New Year's Eve meeting with a handful of Cabinet officials in Baguio, Ms Macapagal ordered the holding of a Cabinet "workshop" this morning in Malacañang to review existing programs and projects.

Ms Macapagal is expected to return to Manila in the afternoon. She called for a full Cabinet meeting on Friday.

Tiglao said the President might launch her administration's "intensified" reform programs by the first or second week of January.

"I would think we would see within the month a series of major executive actions, rather than speeches, to demonstrate her seriousness in undertaking reforms," he said. *With Christine O. Avendaño*

RP backs Asean meeting on Iraq

THE PHILIPPINES is supporting a call for an immediate and extraordinary meeting of foreign ministers of members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations should war break out in the Middle East.

Foreign Secretary Blas Ople said the government was supporting Cambodia's call, made to address possible repercussions in the region of a United States-led attack on Iraq.

"No less than the assembled heads of the member governments acknowledged the need for Asean to be closely involved in developments in Iraq," Ople said in a statement.

Cambodia's proposal was contained in a letter sent by Cambodian Foreign Minister Hor Namhong to the foreign ministers of the Asean nations.

"During the 8th Asean Summit in Cambodia on Nov. 4-5, the assembled heads of government directed the Asean foreign ministers to remain 'seized with the matter' in Iraq and to meet immediately, if necessary, to assess and discuss measures to deal with the situation," Ople said.

Philippine missions in Washington, the Middle East and the United Nations have reported that war in the Middle East looked imminent. The US, insisting that the regime of President Saddam Hussein was keeping weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, is launching a major military buildup in the Gulf.

The government's Middle East Preparedness Team, led by special envoy Roy Cimatu, has gone to the Gulf to institute relocation and evacuation systems for about 1.5 million Filipinos working in the region.

The Armed Forces is also set to send chemical and biological warfare experts to help prepare Filipinos for possible retaliatory strikes by Iraq against US allies in the Middle East.

Also yesterday, National Security Adviser Roilo Golez said the government was not expecting a major shortage of food and oil in the country in the event of a US attack on Iraq.

Golez said concerned government agencies had assured Malacañang the supply of basic commodities would remain stable even if war erupted.

"Although we don't expect any major crisis, particularly in food and oil, all contingency plans have been put in place," Golez said. *Norman Bordadora and Christian Esguerra*

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After 9/11, even legal aliens given hard time in America

By Jerry Esplanada

(Last of two parts)

OAKLAND, California—"A faltering economy, fewer job opportunities, cuts in welfare programs. Then there's the anti-immigrant climate."

Mauro Tumbocon Jr. of the West Bay Pilipino Multi-Service Center said these indicators of "hard times ahead" have been giving even documented Filipino immigrants sleepless nights.

"Illegals or the undocumented ones, many of whom are either homeless or marginally housed, face an even more uncertain future after 9/11," said Tumbocon, West Bay's program director for teen and youth services.

Filipino Americans are the second largest Asian group in the United States at nearly 2.4 million people, next to Chinese Americans. More than 60 percent of Fil-Ams live on the West Coast.

Community leaders, however, claim the actual total number of Fil-Ams is closer to 3 million, including undocumented immigrants (also known as TNTs, short for "*tago ng tago*").

There are no reliable estimates of the number of Filipino TNTs and other illegal aliens in the US or the volume of illegal immigration to this country at any given period.

Estimates of the illegal alien population range from 3.5 to six million, nearly all of whom are in search of employment, said a US General Accounting Office report.

The magazine US News & World Report had reported that the number of illegal immigrants, which it placed at four million, was growing by 300,000 a year.

In a 1988 study, the Philippines was the number three provider of visa overstayers in the US (after Mexico and Haiti, according to Concepcion Montoya in Living in the Shadows, one of the featured articles in "Filipino Americans," a Thousand Oaks, California publication).

Top supplier

From 1985 to 1988, the Philippines averaged 14,800 visa overstayers per year, making it the top Asian country that supplied visa overstayers in the US.

However, more Filipinos are being sent back to the Philippines now than at any other time in American history. The ongoing crackdown on aliens with visa violations is a result of the US Department of Justice's Absconder Apprehension Initiative, a component of Washington's intensified actions against terrorism.

West Bay executive director Edwin Jocson observed the high-stress environment resulting from 9/11 was being used to go after illegals of various nationalities.

The Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks "signaled the start of a dark time for Pinoy TNTs and other illegal aliens, the drive-by victims of the war against the al-Qaida terrorist network."

'Suspects'

"With stringent government requirements, they're getting less and less access to housing, employment, education and health services," noted Tumbocon, a former Manila-based show business writer and film critic.

Illegal aliens who obviously do not want to reveal their identities shun welfare agencies for fear of being caught.

Tumbocon, now a green card holder, pointed out that "after 9/11, anybody who looks different is deemed foreign and suspected of being either an illegal alien or terrorist. All people of color are suspect. It isn't easy anymore being Asian."

Orvy Jundis, one of San Francisco's South of Market community leaders, recalled that "at the height of 9/11, some Filipino homes were raided and Filipinos, among others, were subjected to spot ID checks in the streets, also those riding on buses and trains."

Lillian Galedo, executive director of the activist group Filipinos for Affirmative Action, said that with the hunt for TNTs and other illegals, the US government was "sending a message to the immigrant community—that they're under suspicion and that they're being closely watched."

"Both documented and undocumented immigrants do not feel safe anymore with the dark cloud cast over anybody who's not originally from the US. Foreigners are seen as potential terrorists. It's racist and anti-immigrant," stressed Galedo.

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US group fears …

From page A1

"It is not our place to comment on the internal affairs of sovereign governments," said Pentagon spokesperson Lt. Cmdr. Jeff Davis, who added that the first of the joint military, or Balikatan, exercises with the United States will start early this year as scheduled.

Washington is counting on its allies and other supporters to back the US war against Iraq. Ms Macapagal was among the earliest and strongest supporters of the US-led global antiterrorism campaign.

Elsewhere in the United States, mixed reactions greeted Ms Macapagal's decision not to run in 2004, ranging from cynicism to praise to expressions of concern.

Eric Lachica, the executive director of the American Coalition for Filipino Veterans, said he was concerned that Ms Macapagal "may become a lame-duck President," and no longer a power to reckon with.

"She has been highly visible and committed to the veterans issue, and has gone so far as to urge US President George Bush to help Filipino World War II survivors obtain additional benefits. I don't know what the implications are if this issue would now compete with her other priorities," Lachica said.

But he was optimistic that Ms Macapagal and Philippine Ambassador Albert del Rosario would continue to support the veterans' health care and medical allowance benefits bill which friendly US legislators are expected to introduce in the US Congress this month.

Ploy, praise

Alberto M. Alfaro, the editor of Manila Mail which is circulated in this US capital and the neighboring states of Virginia and Maryland, said the President's decision was "just a ploy to deflect criticisms in the meantime that she is devoting her time to campaigning for the presidency."

But some Filipino-Americans believe Ms Macapagal's act deserved praise.

"President Macapagal-Arroyo's selfless act of statesmanship did not surprise me in the sense that she comes from the same mold as her late father, the honest poor man from Lubao," said Texas-based Filipino-American leader Gus Mercado.

"I think that from the perspective of Filipino-Americans and other overseas workers, her legacy would be her staunch support for Filipino veterans, the dual citizenship and the enfranchisement of millions of overseas Filipinos," he said.

Mercado has been successfully working with US lawyers in the advocacy campaign on behalf of a group of Filipino deportees called the "Texas 10." He had strongly criticized the initial lack of support from the Philippine government, but later commended the cooperation extended by a foreign affairs official.

Mercado said he did not believe that Ms Macapagal would be facing the prospect of a lame-duck presidency for the remaining 18 months of her term.

"On the contrary, oblivious to political motivations and repercussions, I think she will do her utmost to leave a mark that is worthy of her family's good name," he said.

Jonathan Melegrito, the national publicity director of the Washington-based National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA), called Ms Macapagal's decision not to run "an honorable thing to do."

"Her decision should allow her to finish her term with emphasis on governing and leading the country. She can accomplish so much more in the remaining months as President. I wish her well," Melegrito said.

Fil-Am named LA county judge

From page A1

ONGKEKO

by Gov. Gray Davis," said Rafael Ongkeko, 49. "This appointment lifts our hopes and confirms our growing stake in the American democratic system."

He's the fourth Filipino to be appointed to the LA County Superior Court. He is joining Judges Mel Red Recana, Cesar Sarmiento and Tomson Ong, an Inq7 report said.

Ralph is the only son of retired Col. Hermie Ongkeko and Dr. Ludy Ongkeko, who migrated to the United States in 1965.

He has two sisters, Gilda and Geraldine, both professionals and successful in their chosen fields.

Summa cum laude

His father said that Ralph's academic background paved the way for the lawyer's professional success. He graduated from LA's Loyola High School and attended Claremont Colleges' Pomona College.

He obtained a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of California in Santa Barbara with "highest honors" or summa cum laude.

In May 1978, he earned his doctorate at the University of California Berkeley School of Law (Boalt Hall) where he delivered an opening address in Tagalog and Ilocano in behalf of his graduating class. That year, he passed the California Bar exams on his first try.

In 1979, he was the first Filipino-American to join the Los Angeles County Counsel's Office. For the next 17 years, he handled civil litigation for the county.

Private practice

In 1998, he went into private practice. The next year he formed his own litigation firm, Ongkeko, Doyle and Nicholas. He transferred to the law firm Collins, Collins, Muir and Traver in 2001. He handled business, employment and personal injury cases.

Early last year, he returned to the County Counsel's Office where he was assigned to the Sheriff's Legal Advisory Unit.

Ongkeko is a member of the LA County Bar Association, Pasadena Bar Association and the Philippine-American Bar Association. He has also served as volunteer arbitrator for the Los Angeles County Superior Court.

His emphasis on civil litigation and jury trials in state and federal courts has won him the respect of judges and opponents alike, according to his father.

"He has been involved in about seven published decisions reported in the official state cases, which serve as precedents," the elder Ongkeko said.

As a judge, the young Ongkeko would be receiving an annual salary of $139,476 a year.

Out of hospital

The appointment of Ongkeko on Oct. 16 came as his father was in the hospital recovering from Guillain Barré Syndrome or GBS, a rare paralyzing disease.

"I spent 45 days in the hospital, I could not move. My speech was impaired, but I am now fully recovered … We thank the good Lord that there's something to look forward to despite bad weather," said Hermie Ongkeko in an interview on Dec. 24.

REMINDER

To the Devotees of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (SHJ): Tomorrow, FIRST FRIDAY, January 3, 2003,

The SHJ FOUNDATION is giving Statues for Chapels, Schools, Hospitals, Dormitories and other Public Places (NOT for Residences), and pictures with prayers.

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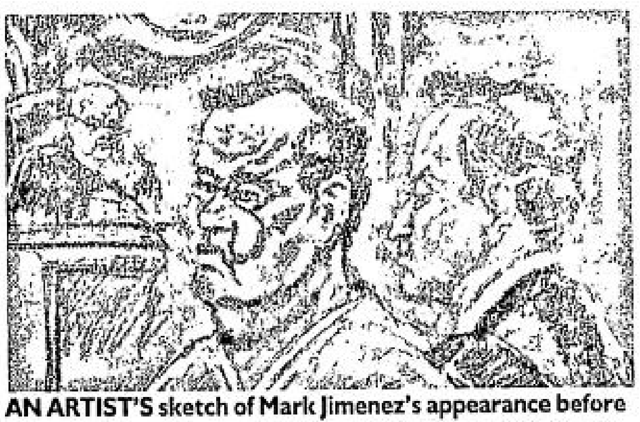
US court grants Jimenez …

From page A1

with court requirements.

Lowell earlier cited Congress disclosure forms in telling the court that Jimenez had assets of $6 million to $8 million, including a $2.5-million home in the Philippines, stocks, bonds, cars and hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash.

Despite arguments from US prosecutors that Jimenez should be kept in jail because he might flee and "cannot be trusted," US Magistrate Ted Bandstra granted bail but only after setting a series of conditions that would allow the congressman to be freed but kept on a tight leash.



AN ARTIST'S sketch of Mark Jimenez's appearance before Judge Ted Bandstra in a federal court in Miami, Florida. At right is his American lawyer Abbe David Lowell. REUTERS

"Your birthday will have to be in court today," Bandstra said after setting bond conditions that will likely keep Jimenez in a federal detention center for a few more days.

Bandstra ordered Jimenez to post a $300,000 corporate surety bond backed by US assets, a $200,000 bond co-signed by six of his relatives and said he would have to live in south Florida with a relative under 24-hour house arrest until the trial.

He also ordered Jimenez to surrender travel documents, told him he could leave the house only with lawyers, could not travel outside south Florida and had to post a document waiving extradition rights in any other country.

Pichay claimed in a telephone interview that the wealthy Jimenez would need to shell out only $65,000 in cash, representing $45,000 premium for the surety bond and 10 percent of the cash up front. The rest of the amount would be backed up by collateral.

Plea bargain

Jimenez is expected to enter into a plea bargain to allow him to return to the Philippines to resume his duties as a congressman of the sixth district of Manila.

"It is very ironic to note that it only took two hours of oral arguments between the prosecution and the defense which after the judge allowed him to post bail while the Philippine Supreme Court denied him his right to bail," Pichay said.

"I hope this will serve as a lesson to the justices of the Supreme Court that the right to bail enshrined in our Constitution should be respected even in extradition cases," Pichay said.

The Supreme Court paved the way for Jimenez to be returned to the United States in a September ruling that said the country should not be a haven for fugitives.

Jimenez fought a justice department move to extradite him to face the US charges.

Pichay said there was a need to review the Philippines' extradition treaty with the United States "so that no Filipino would be a victim of injustice again under our own judicial system."

Rep. Wilfredo Villarama, another House legislator who went to Florida in support of Jimenez, said the SC justices should "study their laws" and "be less political in their decisions."

"I'm so happy at least a person's right to bail was upheld here. Even if the FBI agent was arrogant and less understanding to MJ, we found a judge who is compassionate and humane," said Villarama.

Villarama and Pichay said they would pursue the investigation of US Embassy legal attaché James Nixon whom they accused of deliberately misleading them and diverting Jimenez's flight from Guam to Saipan.

Jolly

Pichay said the bail ruling had lifted Jimenez's spirits.

"When he passed by our seats, we greeted him happy birthday," Pichay said.

"Today he is very jolly, he's the old MJ, very happy," he added.

Pichay said Jimenez might rent an apartment in south Florida.

Collateral

He said a Fr. Thomas Brown had offered the 4-acre land of a Theological School as collateral for Jimenez's bail. The priest appeared at the hearing and even wrote the judge a letter.

The letters of two congressmen—House Majority Leader Neptali Gonzales and Negros Occidental Rep. Apolinario Lozada Jr., chair of the House foreign relations committee—and retired Justice Santiago Kapunan helped clinch the bail decision, Pichay said.

He said Gonzales and Lozada had vouched for Jimenez's character.

The defense had also cited Pichay and Villarama's presence in Miami in support of Jimenez.

The defense also cited the case of Ang, a co-accused in the plunder case against jailed ex-President Estrada, who was similarly granted bail by a US court.

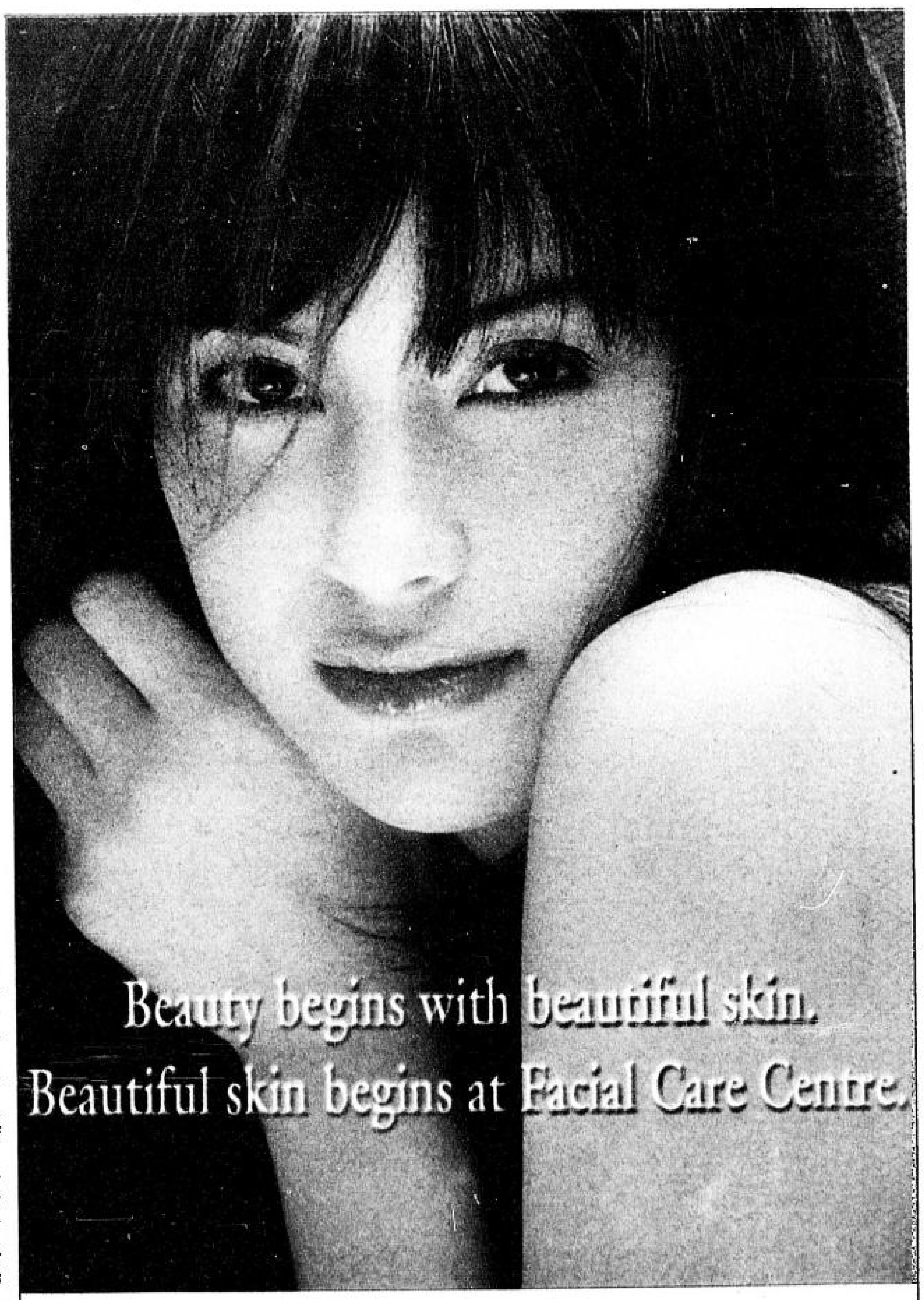
Prosecutors had asked the judge to order Jimenez held without bail, saying he had lots of money and few ties to the United States. They said he had repeatedly maneuvered to avoid returning to the United States to face the charges and had reneged on past deals to bring him there.

"Any promises that Mr. Jimenez makes to this court … simply cannot be trusted," Assistant US Atty. Michael Savage said.

Savage said the most serious charges, fraud and tax evasion, could result in a prison term of 121 to 151 months.

Pichay said if Jimenez enters into a plea bargain, the case could take two months. But if he opts to fight it out, it might take longer.

The two congressmen said they would be leaving Miami today to visit relatives in the United States and eventually to return to Manila. *Juliet Labog-Javellana and Reuters*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FVR emerging Lakas candidate

From page A1

Lakas standard bearer in 2004.

Almario, who chairs the House committee on Mindanao affairs, said "many Lakas congressmen, especially in Mindanao, are now pushing the idea because we have no other choice".

Ramos was the choice of the majority and was also "very much qualified" to run again as the Constitution only banned a President from serving two consecutive terms, Almario said.

Whether Ramos is qualified to run again is sure to be hotly debated, however.

According to a 2001 opinion of his longtime rival, former senator Miriam Defensor Santiago, the Constitutional ban against reelection for presidents was total and applied to "all kinds of presidents, whether incumbent or former, and all kinds of elections".

No word yet from FVR

But Speaker Jose de Venecia, the Lakas NUCD chair, said there has been no word as yet on whether Ramos, the Lakas chair emeritus, has any yearning for a second stab at the presidency.

De Venecia the other day said he favored the ruling party's fielding Sen. Juan Flavier, whom he considered the party's "strongest contender" for 2004, and possibly Sen. Robert Barbers in 2004.

But a stunned Flavier yesterday said he was "not ready" for the presidency.

"That is just Joe (de Venecia) talking," Flavier said in a phone interview in Baguio where he is spending the holidays with his family.

"It's too early ... they may just have added one plus one and came up with four," said Flavier whose senatorial term expires in 2007.

'If it's destiny'

But when asked what he would do if Lakas leaders should formally make the offer, Flavier said: "If it is destiny, if it is God's will, then what can I do?"

Barbers on the other hand is reportedly keen on running as vice president with whomever is chosen as the party standard bearer.

But Lakas is reportedly not closing the door on endorsing the candidacy of former education secretary Raul Roco, who resigned in disgust from the Macapagal-Arroyo Cabinet but who has consistently topped early surveys on presidential preferences.

The source said the People Power Coalition, to which Roco's Aksyon Demokratiko party is allied, "is still very much intact and I see no problem with keeping it that way."

Sen. Francis Pangilinan has cautioned the ruling party against embarking on a search for someone to lead the Lakas ticket this early.

"This obsession of some quarters with 2004 should be shelved and focus should be made on economic and political reforms," Pangilinan said.

Doubly shocked

"The people want results in governance and not political maneuvering and jockeying for position," he said.

Flavier said he was stunned by the President's declaration that she was dropping out of the 2004 presidential race but was doubly shocked on Tuesday when he was mentioned as having topped a supposed list of presidential standard bearers to replace Ms Macapagal.

Flavier said he would rather defer to Ms Macapagal's decision to make 2003 a "governing year" devoid of partisan politics.

"I would prefer that we stop talking about 2004 and just all push the solutions (Ms Macapagal) is about to announce to cure the economy and help our people," he said in Filipino.

His son, Juanito, who runs a restaurant at Camp John Hay said his father had discussed his political aspirations with the family, but had never gone beyond detailing party offers to run as Ms Macapagal's vice president or to run for president himself.

"It was just talk. He never said he has reached any decisions yet," he said.

Flavier admitted to having been earlier offered by Lakas leaders to be Ms Macapagal's running mate in 2004.

The year 2004 will be the midterm period of Flavier's last term. The Constitution allows senators to run for higher office in the middle of their term, with the right to reclaim their original electoral post if they lose.

Roco had used this privilege when he ran and lost in the 1998 presidential elections.

Flavier said he did not feel right about this senatorial privilege and had filed a bill to remove it but his colleagues had blocked it.

"Governors and mayors and government officials will have to resign in order to run for a higher post, but senators do not have this same restriction. I didn't feel it was right," he explained.

List of possibles

De Venecia said Lakas' list of possible presidential contenders would have to give way to changes in the country's politics as a result of Ms Macapagal's decision and the prospects of constitutional change next year.

He said discussing Lakas' political agenda already violated his agreement with the President to make 2003 a year of "no politics, no nonsense" governance."

He pointed out that Flavier and many of Lakas' potential presidential contenders—Vice President Teofisto Guingona Jr., Senate President Franklin Drilon and Senators Robert Barbers and Loren Legarda—would find themselves pitted against several dark horses of the rival political parties like movie star Fernando Poe Jr.

The Speaker said he would get the inputs of businessman Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco, who chairs the National Peoples' Coalition, and Batanes Rep. Florencio Abad of the Liberal Party.

The NPC and LP are part of the People Power Coalition. *With a report from Ferdinand O. Zuasola, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

Susan does not want FPJ to run

From page A1

Speaker Jose de Venecia during a press conference on Tuesday at the Baguio Country Club.

He said he caught up with the Poe couple during the holidays.

"Hindi talagang kandidato si FPJ (FPJ is not really a candidate). Otherwise, he would make very good (political) material. He could run for president. He could run for vice president, he could run for senator," De Venecia said.

De Venecia said Roces had been the most definite about Poe's political career.

Poe himself was "very evasive," and had told De Venecia he would be informed about the actor's plans soon. They could have dinner to discuss it, De Venecia said.

"He is a very interesting person. My wife's family and his family are very close. I am good friends with Fernando Poe Jr.," De Venecia who's married to Gina Vera Perez whose family used to own Sampaguita Pictures, one of the country's biggest movie studios. Sampaguita made Roces a superstar in her time.

"All indications are the Poes do not want it. I think we should respect their decision. We should not force them. Just like the President. We should respect her decision," he said.

De Venecia was referring to President Macapagal's Rizal Day announcement that she would not seek election to the presidency in 2004.

2 Campos murder eyewitnesses in hiding

From page A1

banban could either be a suspect or a witness.

At this point, it boils down to who is more credible, Pascual said.

More troubling is the flight of two key witnesses. They had reportedly fled to the Visayas fearing for their lives, according to the police.

The witnesses, a husband and his wife, have cut all contact with police investigators since leaving for the province weeks ago, according to Pascual.

The Inquirer obtained a copy of a handwritten statement of the witnesses including a sketch of the crime scene, submitted by the husband to authorities immediately after Campos was gunned down in a 24-hour, roadside eatery on Doña Soledad Avenue, Parañaque on Dec. 5.

In the statement, the husband said he and his wife were on their way home at around 2 a.m. when they saw a "large and tall" man, clad in black bonnet, shirt and gloves, firing at another man at the eatery. The victim was later identified as Campos.

"The gunman was very relaxed, shooting focused (on) the person even though his target was already lying on (the) floor," the husband wrote in his statement. "He was shooting and shooting."

The witness further said the assassin was positioned in front of a dark green, heavily tinted Toyota Corolla parked in the middle of Doña Soledad Avenue fronting the eatery.

He said he and his wife did not notice the assassin firing until they tried to overtake the man's vehicle which was blocking the road.

Having nearly hit the gunman, the witnesses said they backed off when the assassin aimed his rifle at them.

"We have lost two valuable witnesses," Pascual told the Inquirer in an interview Monday.

Pascual related that the witnesses had gone into hiding when the names of Berroya, Ong and Sen. Panfilo Lacson surfaced in connection with the murder investigation.

In his sworn statement he issued to the police on Dec. 18, Cabanban, Campos' good friend who was with him when he was killed, said that Campos had feared for his life and the person he feared most was Berroya, director of the police Civil Security Group.

The Inquirer also obtained a copy of Cabanban's affidavit.

"My client has given them a lead and it's up to them to pursue it," Cabanban's lawyer Efren Mercado told the Inquirer in an interview.

But Mercado explained that Cabanban was not accusing Berroya of ordering the killing—which was purportedly to avenge Campos' testimony that sent Berroya to prison on kidnapping charges in 1995.

Earlier, Berroya attacked Cabanban's credibility, saying he was gay who had been dismissed from the Philippine Military Academy for cheating.

Mercado said Cabanban was also convinced that Ong "deserved to be quizzed" about the Campos' murder. Campos and Ong had been lovers when they worked as undercover narcotics agents in the early '90s.

For her part, Ong had accused Sen. Panfilo Lacson, former national police chief, of masterminding the killing allegedly to prevent Campos from exposing Lacson's alleged participation in drug trafficking and kidnapping activities.

The investigation turned into a full-blown controversy when Cabanban floated prominent names in an interview with the Inquirer early last month. In the interview, Cabanban allegedly said that Mike Escaler, younger brother of private banker Ernest Escaler, was with him when he issued a statement at the Parañaque police headquarters hours after the murder. Ernest Escaler had reportedly befriended Campos and Cabanban.

DOH, PNP say revelers' injuries decreased

From page A1

Dayrit said at a press briefing.

"They are becoming more careful. They are using safer ones," he said.

The Department of Health has sponsored TV ads showing bloodied revelers with their hands and fingers blown off by firecrackers. Barangay officials designated firecracker areas and police commanders sealed the gun muzzles of police officers to prevent celebratory firing.

Dayrit announced as "good news" the fact that nobody got killed from firecracker blasts from Dec. 21, 2002 to Jan. 1. A person was killed from firecracker blast last year.

"The numbers are less," Dayrit said. "But the injuries were as devastating."

Dayrit said hospitals had to amputate mostly fingers and hands in 10 percent of the injuries. Nine percent of about 380 firecracker blast victims were eye injuries, he said.

Eighty-one percent of the victims were males. Of those injured, 22 percent were under the influence of liquor.

Seventeen people were reported injured by stray bullets this year, down from 29 the previous year. In Bulacan, a five-year-old girl died after she was hit by a stray bullet. One person was killed last year. *(See related story in Metro, page A15)*

Bataoil said the PNP arrested 10 persons, including seven policemen and a soldier, for firing their guns indiscriminately between Dec. 26, 2002 and Jan. 1.

"They will be discharged automatically," he said. Last year, 13 persons were arrested for indiscriminate firing.

The police recorded 25 fires caused by firecracker explosions during the New Year celebrations.

Northern/ Central Luzon

The death of Joville Bondoc of Barangay San Isidro in Paombong, Bulacan, spoiled what the police called a generally peaceful New Year celebrations and the low number of victims of firecracker blasts in Central and Northern Luzon.

Reports gathered by the Inquirer showed that about 270 people from Central and Northern Luzon suffered from firecracker-related injuries.

Police said Bondoc was watching some neighbors lighting firecrackers and sparklers but she decided to leave to urinate at the back of her house.

Her neighbors then heard a loud sound that they thought came from a firecracker. But they realized that it was a gunshot when they saw the bloodied Bondoc fall.

Bondoc, who was hit in the head, died while being taken to the Perez District Hospital in Hagonoy town.

At least 31 others were reported hurt in various firecracker-related incidents in Bulacan.

In Pampanga, doctors at the Jose Lingad Regional Memorial Hospital noted a big drop in the number of blast victims. At least 27 people were reported hurt in Pampanga.

Until Wednesday morning, doctors reported attending to only 10 victims. The hospital's emergency section treated some 30 blast victims last year.

Dr. Aileen Feliciano said there were more vehicular accidents this time. At least 11 out of the 30 drivers and passengers, who were hurt, were admitted to the hospital's orthopedic ward on Wednesday. Most of the drivers were drunk, she said.

In Nueva Ecija, firecracker-related injuries in the province, however, reached 56.

Danilo Caballero of Cabanatuan City, sought treatment for a bullet wound in the thigh before midnight of Dec. 31. Reports did not say if Caballero was a victim of a stray bullet.

In Zambales, five people were reported hurt in firecracker blasts in the capital town of Iba and in Botolan town.

Reports reaching the Central Luzon police headquarters in Camp Olivas, Pampanga, said 20 people were hurt in Angeles City; 19 in Tarlac; 13 each in Olongapo City and Aurora; and eight in Bataan.

Reports from Northern Luzon also showed fewer blast victims this year, but at least two persons were reported hit by stray bullets in Baguio City.

In Pangasinan, the number of firecracker blast victims also went down by about 50 percent this year, reports said.

But victims of firecracker explosions, mostly children who gathered unexploded firecrackers, were still being taken to hospitals in Dagupan City on Wednesday morning.

Records of the Region I Medical Center (RIMC) in Dagupan showed that 41 people were hurt by firecracker blasts, down from almost 100 last year. At least 15 others were taken to the provincial hospital in San Carlos City.

At least 21 people were reported hurt during the New Year revelries in Isabela.

In Baguio City, police said that 17 people suffered firecracker-related injuries and that two others were hit by stray bullets.

At least four people were reported hurt by firecracker blasts in Ilocos Sur.

In Lucena City, reports from at least three hospitals said that firecrackers injured 15 people, down from more than 30 last year. In Batangas, the number of firecracker blast victims dropped from 14 in Jan. 1 last year to only eight yesterday.

Cebu

At least three people, including a baby, were killed in the city at the height of the revelries welcoming the new year.

Rex Abarre, who was just 20 days old, of Barangay Alaska Mambaling, Cebu City, was taken to a government hospital by his parents and was treated for suffocation after inhaling smoke from an exploded whistle bomb. Doctors failed to revive the baby.

Records from various hospitals in key areas in the Visayas showed 161 sustained injuries, down from 185 last year.

At least 97 blast injuries were recorded in various hospitals in Metro Cebu, up from 70 last year. Cebu recorded one stray bullet victim. Jeffry Samson of Barangay Guadalupe was walking home past midnight when hit in the back. He was in stable condition at presstime.

Last year, indiscriminate firing of guns at the height of the New Year's revelries injured two people , one in Lapu lapu City in Cebu and another in Basey, Samar.

In Negros Occidental, at least 40 persons were injured and a town police chief was shot in the knee by his deputy.

Senior Insp. Rodrigo Padasus Jr., the police chief of Pulupandan town, was shot in the right knee at the town's police station at 8:45 p.m. of Dec. 31 by his deputy, SPO4 Antonieto Grande. Grande reportedly got angry when reprimanded by Padasus for failing to arrive on time for the pre-New Year inspection of firearms.

In Iloilo City, the police reported 18 victims of firecracker blasts as of noon yesterday, lower than the 25 reported last year, according to ICPO records.

In Negros Oriental, an eight-year-old boy from Siapo, San Jose town, sustained second-degree burns after his kerosene-fed bamboo cannon backfired at around noon of New Year's Day.

"I intentionally did not buy firecrackers to keep my son out of danger, yet this thing happened," Edison Ebeb said.

In Tacloban City, authorities recorded five blast victims, all children ages 5 to 12 (four from Tacloban and one from Alangalang, Leyte).

One person was reported hurt by a firecracker blast in Davao City. The victim was Eladio Galagan, 66, of Buhangin District. Last year, the lone victim was a six-year-old boy. Seven people were arrested for violating a firecrackers' ban.

In Cotabato City, four people sustained firecracker injuries. A 13-year-old boy was wounded when hit by stray bullet. *Reports from Tonette Orejas, Carmela Reyes, Anselmo Roque, Cesar Villa and Jo Clemente, PDI Central Luzon Desk; Villamor Visaya Jr., Yolanda Sotelo-Fuertes, Leoncio Balbin Jr. and Desiree Caluza, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau; Mei Magsino, and Delfin T. Mallari Jr, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau; Carla P. Gomez, Joey A. Gabieta, Jolene Bulambot, Jhunnex Napallacan, Nestor Burgos Jr. and Alex Pal, PDI Visayas Bureau; and, Anthony S. Allada and Edwin O. Fernandez, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

8 dead, 28 wounded in Tacurong bombing

From page A1

hurt when a bomb exploded in a crowded flea market at the city plaza here at 7:20 p.m. Tuesday. Most of the victims were buying firecrackers in stalls designated as "firecrackers zone."

At the time of the explosion, the plaza was guarded by 20 members of the Civilian Volunteer Organization, a team of policemen and another team of government soldiers.

Col. Agustin Dema-ala, 301st Army Brigade chief, said only a grenade could create a crater of that size. "No one has claimed responsibility for the attack but we are looking at groups identified with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)," Dema-ala said.

But MILF spokesperson Eid Kabalu denied the allegations. "We are always blamed for atrocities even if it's not yet conclusive," he said of the investigation.

Tacurong is a mainly Christian agricultural city at the heart of Sultan Kudarat, next to Maguindanao province, where the MILF has many bases. The city has had many grenade attacks in the past, blamed on MILF members from the province's interior.

Communist New People's Army rebels also have a presence in Tacurong, but they are not known to have staged attacks similar to Tuesday's.

Insp. Jaime Gaudilla, Tacurong City police chief, said a "teenage-looking man" could be behind the explosion.

He said the suspect got the ire of one of the firecracker vendors when the former suspiciously stood for some time in front of the stalls without buying anything.

Gaudilla said the vendor and the suspect engaged in an argument which resulted in the latter allegedly throwing a grenade. The vendor saw how the man lobbed the grenade "and she swore she can identify him," Gaudilla said.

The explosion left a 3-inch deep, 4-inch wide crater on the concrete pavement.

28 killed since Dec. 23

Mayor Lino Montilla said he did not expect the bombing as the city had just held "bigger" activities at the plaza, which is just a stone's throw away from City Hall.

On Dec. 23, the city government started its Christmas activities with a "Light-a-Tree" project, turning part of the plaza into a flea market. On Dec. 24, almost 20,000 people showed up at the fireworks display at the plaza, where a concert was staged three days later.

Although there were no threats before the bomb attack, police and military were placed on high alert. Montilla had ordered the police and military to tighten security at the public market and churches where there are more people.

The mayor on Tuesday afternoon ordered the confiscation of firecrackers displayed at the public market, according to Chief Supt. Jose Dalumpines, Central Mindanao police chief.

It was the sixth blast that have hit the provinces of Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao and Cotabato since Dec. 23. A total of 28 people were killed and 71 others injured in bomb attacks blamed by military authorities on the MILF. Seventeen people, including Mayor Saudi Ampatuan of Datu Piang in Maguindanao, were killed in a homemade bomb attack on Dec. 23. *With reports from Edwin O. Fernandez and Charlie C. Señase, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

FVR emerging Lakas candidate

From page A1

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"It's too early ... they may just have added one plus one and came up with four," said Flavier whose senatorial term expires in 2007.

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"We have lost two valuable witnesses," Pascual told the INQUIRER in an interview Monday.

Pascual related that the witnesses had gone into hiding when the names of Berroya, Ong and Sen. Panfilo Lacson surfaced in connection with the murder investigation.

In his sworn statement he issued to the police on Dec. 18, Cabanban, Campos' good friend who was with him when he was killed, said that Campos had feared for his life and the person he feared most was Berroya, director of the police Civil Security Group.

The INQUIRER also obtained a copy of Cabanban's affidavit.

"My client has given them a lead and it's up to them to pursue it," Cabanban's lawyer Efren Mercado told the INQUIRER in an interview.

But Mercado explained that Cabanban was not accusing Berroya of ordering the killing—which was purportedly to avenge Campos' testimony that sent Berroya to prison on kidnapping charges in 1995.

Earlier, Berroya attacked Cabanban's credibility, saying he was gay who had been dismissed from the Philippine Military Academy for cheating.

Mercado said Cabanban was also convinced that Ong "deserved to be quizzed" about the Campos' murder. Campos and Ong had been lovers when they worked as undercover narcotics agents in the early '90s.

For her part, Ong had accused Sen. Panfilo Lacson, former national police chief, of masterminding the killing allegedly to prevent Campos from exposing Lacson's alleged participation in drug trafficking and kidnapping activities.

The investigation turned into a full-blown controversy when Cabanban floated prominent names in an interview with the INQUIRER early last month. In the interview, Cabanban allegedly said that Mike Escaler, younger brother of private banker Ernest Escaler, was with him when he issued a statement at the Parañaque police headquarters hours after the murder. Ernest Escaler had reportedly befriended Campos and Cabanban.

DOH, PNP say revelers' injuries decreased

From page A1

Dayrit said at a press briefing.

"They are becoming more careful. They are using safer ones," he said.

The Department of Health has sponsored TV ads showing bloodied revelers with their hands and fingers blown off by firecrackers. Barangay officials designated firecracker areas and police commanders sealed the gun muzzles of police officers to prevent celebratory firing.

Dayrit announced as "good news" the fact that nobody got killed from firecracker blasts from Dec. 21, 2002 to Jan. 1. A person was killed from firecracker blast last year.

"The numbers are less," Dayrit said. "But the injuries were as devastating."

Dayrit said hospitals had to amputate mostly fingers and hands in 10 percent of the injuries. Nine percent of about 380 firecracker blast victims were eye injuries, he said.

Eighty-one percent of the victims were males. Of those injured, 22 percent were under the influence of liquor.

Seventeen people were reported injured by stray bullets this year, down from 29 the previous year. In Bulacan, a five-year-old girl died after she was hit by a stray bullet. One person was killed last year. *(See related story in Metro, page A15)*

Bataoil said the PNP arrested 10 persons, including seven policemen and a soldier, for firing their guns indiscriminately between Dec. 26, 2002 and Jan. 1.

"They will be discharged automatically," he said. Last year, 13 persons were arrested for indiscriminate firing.

The police recorded 25 fires caused by firecracker explosions during the New Year celebrations.

Northern/ Central Luzon

The death of Joville Bondoc of Barangay San Isidro in Paombong, Bulacan, spoiled what the police called a generally peaceful New Year celebrations and the low number of victims of firecracker blasts in Central and Northern Luzon.

Reports gathered by the INQUIRER showed that about 270 people from Central and Northern Luzon suffered from firecracker-related injuries.

Police said Bondoc was watching some neighbors lighting firecrackers and sparklers but she decided to leave to urinate at the back of her house.

Her neighbors then heard a loud sound that they thought came from a firecracker. But they realized that it was a gunshot when they saw the bloodied Bondoc fall.

Bondoc, who was hit in the head, died while being taken to the Perez District Hospital in Hagonoy town.

At least 31 others were reported hurt in various firecracker-related incidents in Bulacan.

In Pampanga, doctors at the Jose Lingad Regional Memorial Hospital noted a big drop in the number of blast victims. At least 27 people were reported hurt in Pampanga.

Until Wednesday morning, doctors reported attending to only 10 victims. The hospital's emergency section treated some 30 blast victims last year.

Dr. Aileen Feliciano said there were more vehicular accidents this time. At least 11 out of the 30 drivers and passengers, who were hurt, were admitted to the hospital's orthopedic ward on Wednesday. Most of the drivers were drunk, she said.

In Nueva Ecija, firecracker-related injuries in the province, however, reached 56.

Danilo Caballero of Cabanatuan City, sought treatment for a bullet wound in the thigh before midnight of Dec. 31. Reports did not say if Caballero was a victim of a stray bullet.

In Zambales, five people were reported hurt in firecracker blasts in the capital town of Iba and in Botolan town.

Reports reaching the Central Luzon police headquarters in Camp Olivas, Pampanga, said 20 people were hurt in Angeles City; 19 in Tarlac; 13 each in Olongapo City and Aurora; and eight in Bataan.

Reports from Northern Luzon also showed fewer blast victims this year, but at least two persons were reported hit by stray bullets in Baguio City.

In Pangasinan, the number of firecracker blast victims also went down by about 50 percent this year, reports said.

But victims of firecracker explosions, mostly children who gathered unexploded firecrackers, were still being taken to hospitals in Dagupan City on Wednesday morning.

Records of the Region I Medical Center (RIMC) in Dagupan showed that 41 people were hurt by firecracker blasts, down from almost 100 last year. At least 15 others were taken to the provincial hospital in San Carlos City.

At least 21 people were reported hurt during the New Year revelries in Isabela.

In Baguio City, police said that 17 people suffered firecracker-related injuries and that two others were hit by stray bullets.

At least four people were reported hurt by firecracker blasts in Ilocos Sur.

In Lucena City, reports from at least three hospitals said that firecrackers injured 15 people, down from more than 30 last year. In Batangas, the number of firecracker blast victims dropped from 14 in Jan. 1 last year to only eight yesterday.

Cebu

At least three people, including a baby, were killed in the city at the height of the revelries welcoming the new year.

Rex Abarre, who was just 20 days old, of Barangay Alaska Mambaling, Cebu City, was taken to a government hospital by his parents and was treated for suffocation after inhaling smoke from an exploded whistle bomb. Doctors failed to revive the baby.

Records from various hospitals in key areas in the Visayas showed 161 sustained injuries, down from 185 last year.

At least 97 blast injuries were recorded in various hospitals in Metro Cebu, up from 70 last year. Cebu recorded one stray bullet victim. Jeffry Samson of Barangay Guadalupe was walking home past midnight when hit in the back. He was in stable condition at presstime.

Last year, indiscriminate firing of guns at the height of the New Year's revelries injured two people , one in Lapu lapu City in Cebu and another in Basey, Samar.

In Negros Occidental, at least 40 persons were injured and a town police chief was shot in the knee by his deputy.

Senior Insp. Rodrigo Padasus Jr., the police chief of Pulupandan town, was shot in the right knee at the town's police station at 8:45 p.m. of Dec. 31 by his deputy, SPO4 Antonieto Grande. Grande reportedly got angry when reprimanded by Padasus for failing to arrive on time for the pre-New Year inspection of firearms.

In Iloilo City, the police reported 18 victims of firecracker blasts as of noon yesterday, lower than the 25 reported last year, according to ICPO records.

In Negros Oriental, an eight-year-old boy from Siapo, San Jose town, sustained second-degree burns after his kerosene-fed bamboo cannon backfired at around noon of New Year's Day.

"I intentionally did not buy firecrackers to keep my son out of danger, yet this thing happened," Edison Ebeb said.

In Tacloban City, authorities recorded five blast victims, all children ages 5 to 12 (four from Tacloban and one from Alang-alang, Leyte).

One person was reported hurt by a firecracker blast in Davao City. The victim was Eladio Galagan, 66, of Buhangin District. Last year, the lone victim was a six-year-old boy. Seven people were arrested for violating a firecrackers' ban.

In Cotabato City, four people sustained firecracker injuries. A 13-year-old boy was wounded when hit by stray bullet. *Reports from Tonette Orejas, Carmela Reyes, Anselmo Roque, Cesar Villa and Jo Clemente, PDI Central Luzon Desk; Villamor Visaya Jr., Yolanda Sotelo-Fuertes, Leoncio Balbin Jr. and Desiree Caluza, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau; Mei Magsino, and Delfin T. Mallari Jr, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau; Carla P. Gomez, Joey A. Gabieta, Jolene Bulambot, Jhunnex Napallacan, Nestor Burgos Jr. and Alex Pal, PDI Visayas Bureau; and, Anthony S. Allada and Edwin O. Fernandez, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

8 dead, 28 wounded in Tacurong bombing

From page A1

hurt when a bomb exploded in a crowded flea market at the city plaza here at 7:20 p.m. Tuesday. Most of the victims were buying firecrackers in stalls designated as "firecrackers zone."

At the time of the explosion, the plaza was guarded by 20 members of the Civilian Volunteer Organization, a team of policemen and another team of government soldiers.

Col. Agustin Dema-ala, 301st Army Brigade chief, said only a grenade could create a crater of that size. "No one has claimed responsibility for the attack but we are looking at groups identified with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)," Dema-ala said.

But MILF spokesperson Eid Kabalu denied the allegations. "We are always blamed for atrocities even if it's not yet conclusive," he said of the investigation.

Tacurong is a mainly Christian agricultural city at the heart of Sultan Kudarat, next to Maguindanao province, where the MILF has many bases. The city has had many grenade attacks in the past, blamed on MILF members from the province's interior.

Communist New People's Army rebels also have a presence in Tacurong, but they are not known to have staged attacks similar to Tuesday's.

Insp. Jaime Gaudilla, Tacurong City police chief, said a "teenage-looking man" could be behind the explosion.

He said the suspect got the ire of one of the firecracker vendors when the former suspiciously stood for some time in front of the stalls without buying anything.

Gaudilla said the vendor and the suspect engaged in an argument which resulted in the latter allegedly throwing a grenade. The vendor saw how the man lobbed the grenade "and she swore she can identify him," Gaudilla said.

The explosion left a 3-inch deep, 4-inch wide crater on the concrete pavement.

28 killed since Dec. 23

Mayor Lino Montilla said he did not expect the bombing as the city had just held "bigger" activities at the plaza, which is just a stone's throw away from City Hall.

On Dec. 23, the city government started its Christmas activities with a "Light-a-Tree" project, turning part of the plaza into a flea market. On Dec. 24, almost 20,000 people showed up at the fireworks display at the plaza, where a concert was staged three days later.

Although there were no threats before the bomb attack, police and military were placed on high alert. Montilla had ordered the police and military to tighten security at the public market and churches where there are more people.

The mayor on Tuesday afternoon ordered the confiscation of firecrackers displayed at the public market, according to Chief Supt. Jose Dalumpines, Central Mindanao police chief.

It was the sixth blast that have hit the provinces of Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao and Cotabato since Dec. 23. A total of 28 people were killed and 71 others injured in bomb attacks blamed by military authorities on the MILF. Seventeen people, including Mayor Saudi Ampatuan of Datu Piang in Maguindanao, were killed in a homemade bomb attack on Dec 23. *With reports from Edwin O. Fernandez and Charlie C. Señase, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

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Terrorist attacks made 2002 a bad year for PNP

By TJ Burgonio

FOR THE Philippine National Police, maintaining law and order in 2002 was made "much more challenging" by the wave of bombings in Mindanao and Manila in October that confirmed authorities' worst fears that international terrorism had arrived on our shores.

In the first three quarters of the year, the PNP was focused on cracking down on the 21 criminal gangs believed responsible for the high incidence of kidnap-for-ransom, car thefts and bank robberies being committed throughout the country.

All this changed after the rash of terrorist attacks in October, starting with the bombing of a videoke bar in Malagutay, Zamboanga City on the night of Oct. 2 that killed an American serviceman and two civilians.

On Oct. 17, two bomb blasts ripped through the crowded Shop-O-Rama department store and the adjacent Shoppers Central also in Zamboanga City, leaving seven people dead and at least 150 others wounded.

The following day, a bomb exploded in a bus on Edsa, Quezon City, killing two and wounding 22.

Then on the night of Oct. 20, a home-made bomb exploded at the entrance to the Fort Pilar Shrine in Zamboanga City, killing a Filipino Marine.

International link

Authorities had blamed the attacks on the Abu Sayyaf, an extremist separatist Muslim group that had turned to kidnapping tourists and other acts of banditry after its former patron, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, started peace talks with the government.

The Abu Sayyaf has been linked by the US to the al-Qaida international terror network of Osama bin Laden.

"(Things became) more challenging with the introduction of transnational terrorism," said Director Ricardo de Leon of the police community relations office.

It was the arrest of Indonesian national Fathur Rohman al-Ghozi by police intelligence agents in Quiapo, Manila in January last year that made clear to the authorities that international terrorism had reached the country.

Al-Ghozi, a confessed member of Jemaah Islamiah, which also has links to al-Qaida, admitted funding and plotting with a member of the MILF the five bombings in Metro Manila on Dec. 30, 2000 that killed 18 people and wounded scores of others.

Retaliation

The attacks were in retaliation for the government's all-out war against the secessionist MILF on the orders of then President Joseph Estrada in the middle of 2000.

Al Ghozi was charged with possession of a cache of powerful explosives and sentenced to 12 years in prison.

With the threat posed by global terrorism, the PNP had to "refocus" its anti-crime effort and designate a dedicated unit, the Intelligence Group, to monitor the movements of suspected terrorists, local and foreign, De Leon said.

Since then, Philippine authorities have arrested at least six members of the Abu Sayyaf for the bombings in Zamboanga City.

Thousands march, pray vs Hong Kong maids tax

HONG KONG—Thousands of foreign maids working here marched on New Year's Day to protest a proposed tax on their wages.

"No to levy, no to wage cut," chanted the domestic workers as they marched from Victoria Park to Chater Garden where they held a prayer rally. "The people united will never be defeated."

Filipinos make up the biggest number of live-in maids in Hong Kong, with an estimated 153,000 of them working here, followed by some 70,000 Indonesians and smaller numbers of Thais and Nepalese.

Organizers said about 8,000 migrant workers participated in the march—the biggest in recent months—against the proposed monthly levy, which would range from HK$400 to HK$750 (between US$51 and US$96). Police said they had no immediate crowd estimate.

"The levy is a big amount on our part," said 33-year-old Marilyn Manipon, a demonstrator and native of Pangasinan.

The issue has sparked concern among Filipino, Indonesian and Thai officials. Philippine Labor Secretary Patricia Sto. Tomas visited Hong Kong last month to lobby against the tax.

Sto. Tomas had warned that the tax would not only harm the maids and their families back home, but also Hong Kong's economy as the workers would cut back on their spending here.

Last month, thousands of foreign domestic workers staged a protest after Hong Kong legislator and Liberal Party chair James Tien proposed that a HK$500 (US$64) a month levy be charged the employers of foreign maids.

Tien also suggested reducing the domestics' minimum wage by the same amount to HK$3,170, a cut of 14 percent.

"We don't want the tax or a pay cut. Life is hard already," said a domestic helper identified only as Eva who attended the prayer assembly.

"We work more than 18 hours a day," she added.

Sto. Tomas had warned the Philippine government might stop domestic helpers from going to work in Hong Kong if the monthly tax was imposed. *AP, AFP*

SC asks gov't to comment on Meralco refund

THE SUPREME Court has ordered the government to comment on a motion by the Manila Electric Co. appealing the Nov. 15 high court order that it refund billions of pesos in excess charges to electricity consumers.

The SC Third Division chaired by Associate Justice Reynato S. Puno ordered the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) to show cause why the high court should not entertain the Meralco motion for reconsideration.

The ERC was given 10 days from receipt of the resolution to comply.

The SC order was merely procedural, issued last week before it passes judgment on the Meralco motion.

Meralco filed its motion on Dec. 5, beating the 15-day deadline for appealing the adverse decision.

In its motion, Meralco said the high court's order to refund excess charges to customers since 1994 had "destroyed the rule of law" in the country, replacing it with the "rule of the popular." *Michael Lim Ubac*

Filipina nurse's body arrives from England

THE REMAINS of Debbie Remorozo arrived at 6:30 last night at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport, almost a month after the Filipina nurse was killed in her apartment in greater Manchester, England.

Labor Secretary Patricia Sto. Tomas and an unidentified brother of Remorozo were on hand for the body's arrival. The body is to be brought to Remorozo's hometown in Camarines Sur where her grieving family was waiting.

Remorozo, a nurse at the Royal Oldham Hospital, was found lying in a pool of blood at the Summervale House on Vale Drive, greater Manc[illegible] afternoon of Dec. 8.

[illegible] Manila as scheduled [illegible] from London.

Manc[illegible] police have yet to announce the findings of their investigation. *Norman Bordadora*

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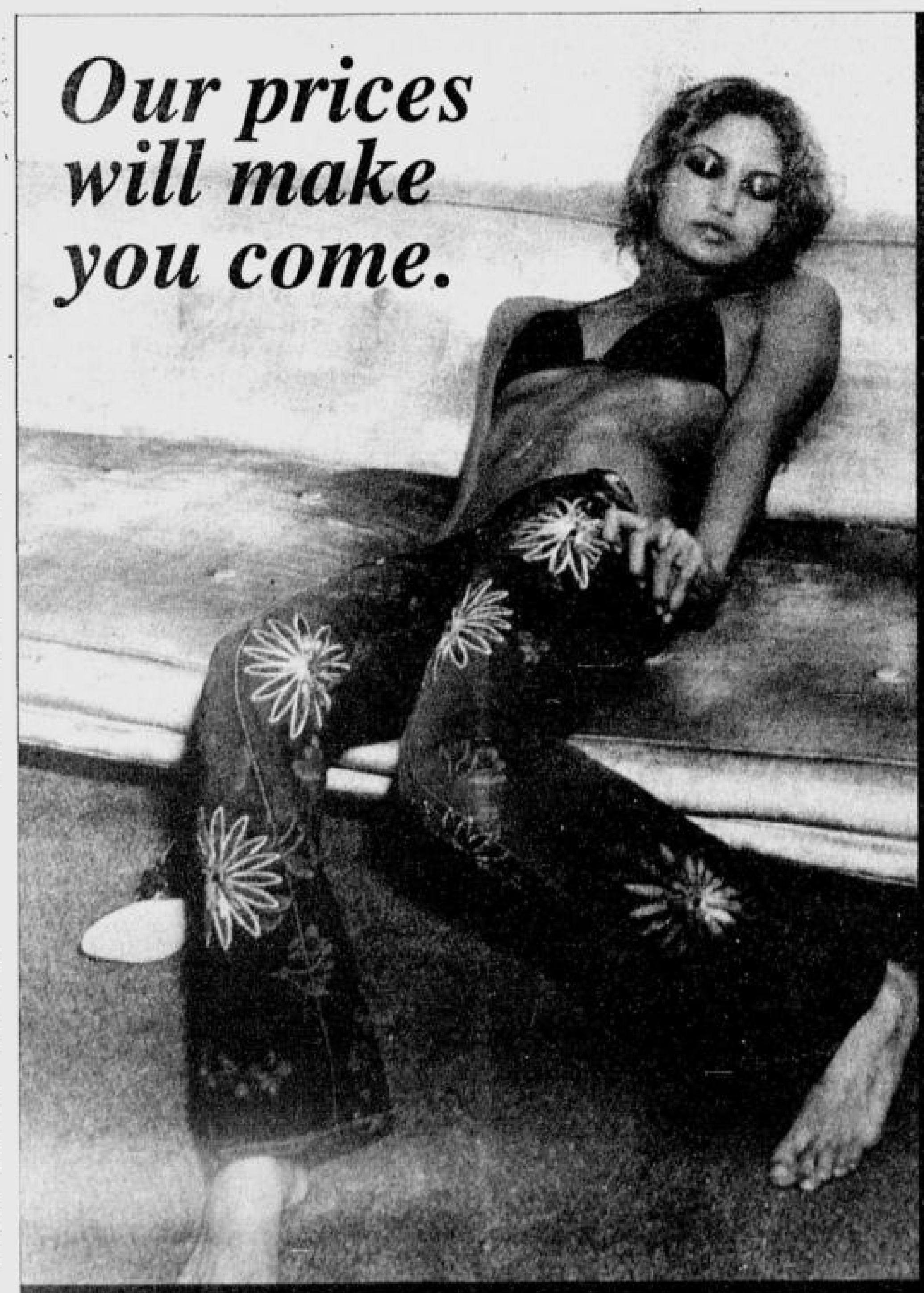
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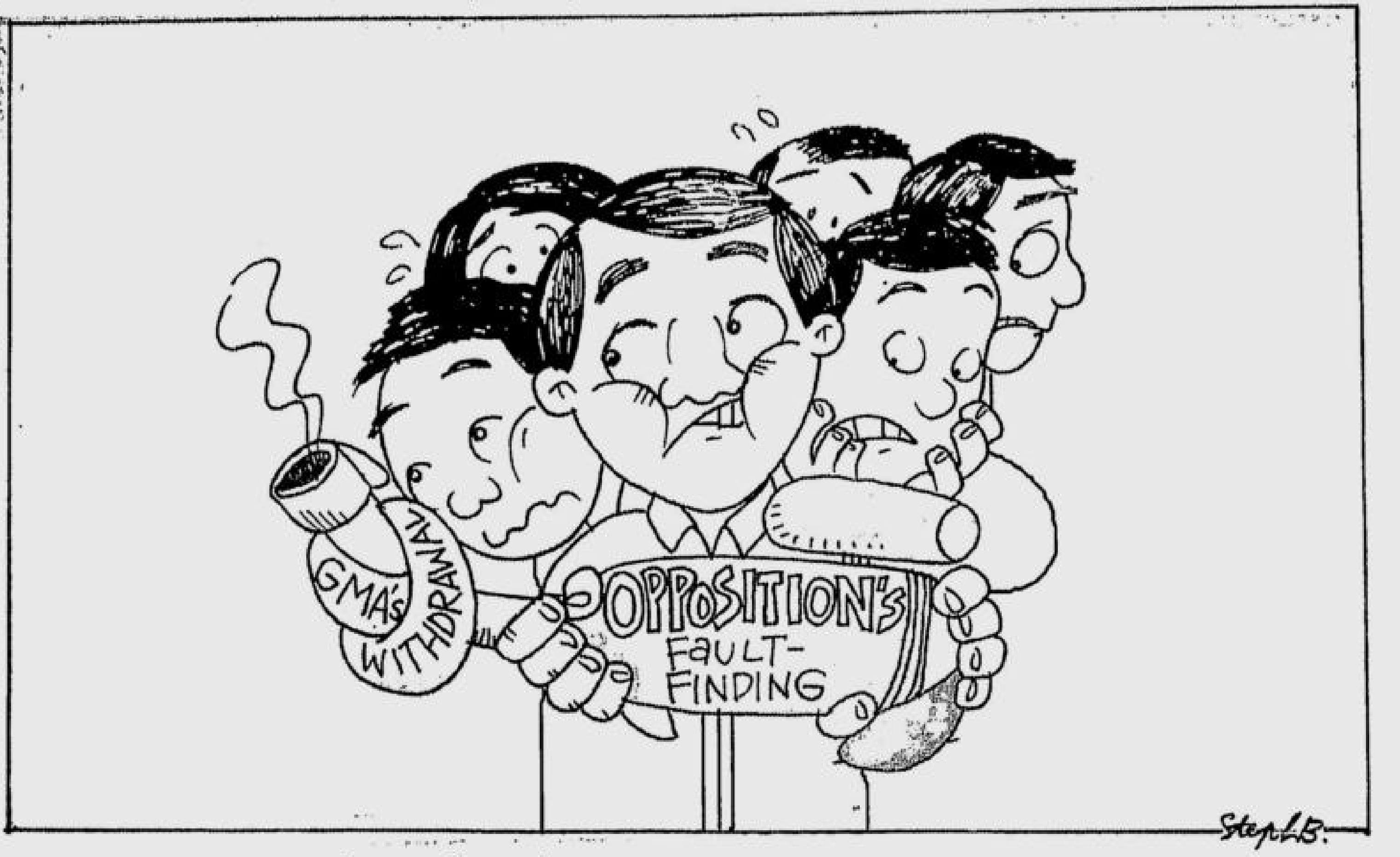


Altered landscape

EDITORIAL

THE withdrawal of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo from the 2004 election wiped off the board the static political scenarios drawn by political observers who failed to recognize the dynamism and volatility of Philippine politics.

In one spectacular stroke, the President's Dec. 30 announcement altered a sterile political landscape and opened a new horizon with fresh issues, personalities and configurations of rivals in the 2004 contest. It swept away everything and presented a clean slate upon which the political drama of the next year and a half will be sketched.

Before Dec. 30, we seemed destined to move into the new year facing the boredom of the political deadlocks of 2002. After that announcement, politics will be fought on a wider scope and over new issues.

To begin with, the President's withdrawal removes her not only as the centerpiece of the 2004 campaign, but more so as the principal object for bashing by the opposition and the forever disgruntled "civil society" malcontents whose survival has fed on relentless fault-finding with the Macapagal presidency.

With President Macapagal out of the line of fire, the more mindless segments of the opposition and civil society will have to create new issues and find new straw persons they can flog. President Macapagal's performance in the presidency will no longer be the key issue in the 2004 contest.

Public opinion survey organizations will also have to redraw their catalogue of issues and contenders, removing some and adding others in their premature list of presidential possibilities—a list that is most often drawn arbitrarily.

From now on the elections will be fought on the issue of what presidential aspirants will offer by way of new policies and programs to hasten economic growth, promote political and social reforms, build national consensus, restore law and order, and end the poisonous divisiveness in Philippine politics.

One of the clear losers in the Macapagal withdrawal is the Estrada wing of the opposition. This wing, which counts among its stalwarts Sen. Panfilo Lacson, has owed its survival after Estrada's fall from the presidency to issues linked to the accession and legitimacy of Ms Macapagal's assumption of power. The trial of the plunder case against Estrada is more than halfway in the Sandiganbayan and the withdrawal of the President from the 2004 elections depoliticizes the issue. The Estrada-based opposition segment will have to redraw their 2004 strategy and redefine their issues.

The more moderate wing of the opposition, which is identified with the principle of consensus building of the national agenda and critical collaboration with the administration, has found more space to promote their own agenda in the face of the new political environment. Ms Macapagal's withdrawal from the presidential race is bound to deepen and widen the ideological split in the opposition which has been disarmed by her decision.

The majority coalition, on the other hand, has lost its centerpiece with Ms Macapagal's decision. It is not losing time in building a new leadership structure. Speaker Jose de Venecia, who is co-chair with President Macapagal of the coalition led by Lakas, is meeting with the executive committee on Jan. 8 to tackle the leadership issue in order to avoid a political vacuum.

New names, previously missed by public opinion surveys which have substituted for the important process of pre-selection primaries, are now being touted. This is a positive sign of the winds of change blowing across the political horizon after the President's surprise announcement.

Ms Macapagal has defined her tasks for the remainder of her term. These are: strengthening the economy to create more jobs and to encourage business activity that is unhampered by corruption and red tape in government; healing the deep divisions within our society; and working for a clean and honest election in 2004. She can now address these tasks without being hobbled by the constraints of someone seeking election. She will no longer be hampered by the narrow considerations of scoring political points.

With her decision, the President has thrown off the shackles of partisan politics and transformed herself overnight into a statesman, gaining autonomy from the short-sighted goals of electioneering for 2004. That should give the nation some reason for optimism about the rest of her term.

Only 363 days to New Year's Eve

AS I SEE IT

Neal H. Cruz

WHAT happened to the police's vaunted "firecracker zones"? What happened to the police ban on exploding firecrackers outside of these zones? What happened to the police ban on the *super lolo, pla-pla, bawang*, whistle bomb, bombshell, Five Star *triangulo*, etc.? Fully 80 percent of the firecrackers exploded on New Year's Eve were the banned ones. And almost all were exploded outside the vaunted "firecracker zones." Was anybody arrested for violating these police rules?

Shortly after midnight of New Year's Eve, Channel 7 showed scenes inside the emergency rooms of some government hospitals in Metro Manila. There were people—children and foolish adults—with injured hands being treated by overworked doctors, alongside victims of stabbings and rumbles, the result of drinking too much liquor during the revelry. These images showed that despite the police warnings and press releases, people still violated the law in droves and that the police did not enforce it at all. If the law had been enforced, there wouldn't have been that many injured in the hospitals.

It's too late now to save those dead and maimed from their foolishness and the abdication by the police and the local government officials of their duties. But there's plenty of time to finally stop the annual masochistic mayhem. It's 363 days before the next New Year's Eve. Surely, that's enough time to make the pyrotechnics manufacturers obey the law.

The law is very clear. It enumerates what devices can and cannot be manufactured. Is it so hard for local governments, which issue the licenses, to make the manufacturers obey the law? There are only a few municipalities, mostly in Bulacan and Cebu, where pyrotechnics are manufactured. Is it so hard for the Philippine National Police to monitor these municipalities without succumbing to temptation?

But now that the revelry is over, many of those injured have gone home and the hospitals have returned to normal routine, the police will heave a sigh of relief and say, "Thank God, that's over." Then they will go back to doing nothing—until they recycle the old press releases before the next New Year's Eve.

Meanwhile, those who were victims of this dereliction of duty will go through life forever scarred and disabled. Children who lost a finger or hand will be teased as "*putol*," those who were blinded will be called "*bulag*," those who became deaf will be called "*bingi*" for the rest of their lives. And instead of being sorry for those who died, they will be jeered as "*gago*" and "*tanga*."

The police, the local governments and the pyrotechnics manufacturers share the collective guilt for the victims' misfortunes. But they are never punished. Only the victims are.

* * *

With the abdication of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, there will be a scramble not only to be the standard bearer of the administration partly but also for inclusion in its senatorial ticket. Cabinet members and other officials who will surely lose their jobs within 18 months will try to wangle a spot in the ticket. Watch the free-for-all and backstabbing.

The best part of GMA's abdication is that all the pompous, arrogant and opportunistic officials of the Macapagal administration will be toppled from their positions of power. The opportunistic "bargain-hunter" and status seeker, the new Pacman who suddenly became an influence peddler because of his closeness to the President, has suddenly lost his value and instead has become a liability to his benefactors.

All those pompous asses clinging to GMA's skirt have suddenly become lame ducks ripe for the frying pan. They will have no place to run to but the Senate, a very long shot. The House of Representatives will also be a long shot because the incumbents or their relatives will fight tooth and nail to keep their privileged position.

So while GMA's shocker will free her to do her job as she sees fit, it may also free her subordinates to do their thing, feather their nests and provide for the future during the remaining 18 months. The President will really have to crack down on corruption if she wants to leave behind a legacy of reforms.

The biggest beneficiary is, of course, the opposition presidential hopefuls. Suddenly, the fight is even. The other administration presidential aspirants are on an even keel with the opposition candidates. The opposition doesn't even have to field FPJ to win. Others now suddenly have equal chances of winning.

Ironically, the man best qualified for the presidency in administrative ability, intellect and experience is behind in the survey ratings. He is Sen. Edgardo Angara. But he is only seventh place in the Social Weather Stations survey. Angara also topped the Senate winners when he first ran for senator, soon after he finished a stint as president of the University of the Philippines.

The problem with Angara is that he cannot speak before a crowd as fluently as showbiz people. He needs a tutor in public speaking. But pound for pound, I think he outweighs the other aspirants in the ability to push reforms and guide the country out of the doldrums.

But alas, Filipino voters are easily swayed by the glib of tongue and the *artistas*. So the likelihood is that we will end up with another disappointment.

Better late than never

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

IT WOULD have been better if Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo had done it from Day One. That is, declare she would not run for president but would devote her three and a half years to turning this country around. But I'll take my blessings where I can find them.

That's what I've been saying all along. Or at least since GMA delivered her first State of the Nation Address, where she asked everyone to abandon "politicking" and pitch in to move the country forward. Indeed, where she asked everyone to make personal sacrifices for the common good. I said then that there was a saying in Filipino that when you point a finger at someone, four fingers point right back at you. Her exhortation applied to her first and last. She could have said there and then that she was willing to do as she preached, she was setting an example and abandoning her political ambitions altogether. That way, she could prove to the world she deserved to inherit the mantle of Edsa II and was serious about asking for unity.

But better late than never. I'm glad she took my unsolicited advice, and for the same reasons I've been citing.

The cynical, of course, are saying this is just a case of someone discovering wisdom in adversity, or of someone turning necessity into a choice. GMA's ratings were never high to begin with. Since the scandals rocked her administration, moreover, and since people found themselves worse off this year than at any time in the past (despite the official statistics showing respectable growth), she has fallen even lower in the public esteem. So, the cynical say, this looks like a case of turning force majeure into gratuitous enlightenment.

And of course, the even more cynical are saying this is just a ploy to raise GMA's stock, or at least arrest its rapid decline. Once she bounces back, she can always decide to overturn her decision, claiming the public is clamoring for her to run, she cannot possibly turn her back on them.

But I myself prefer to look at it on the bright side, not least because it seems like a good way to start the year. I prefer to think miracles still happen in this day and age. Over the past couple of months, several people, alarmed by the extent to which this country had been driven by partisan politics or indeed by prospective candidates already campaigning well before the 2004 elections, have told me that I was right to suggest that GMA should have said from the start she wasn't running. Then we would not have been beset by all this trouble. But, alas, they said, you might as well bid the scorpion not to bite the ox that is bringing it to the other side of the river. It was in her nature to crave power.

Well, if she will live up to the vow she made last Monday in the nippy Baguio air (it's been known to give people a high), she will have proven either that that was never her nature or that even scorpions can change. Either way it is no minor miracle. I myself am not particularly worried that her vow is just a ploy to improve public acceptance. Because if so, then it is not just a dangerous ploy but a self-destructive one. Hell hath no fury like the Filipinos duped. For all its appearance of bowing to the inevitable, I prefer to think of GMA's conversion as having elements of Saul being struck by divine light on the road to Damascus.

It isn't lacking in courage, or wisdom. Not everyone can bow to the inevitable. Power is a heady brew and addles people's brains faster than alcohol or drugs. It is also its own natural insulator: People in power tend to grow an ass-licking coterie that sings only their praises. To see through the tangled skein of subterfuge and deceptions (the coterie will always have an explanation for falling ratings and no end of suggestions on how to solve it) and espy the truth about the world and oneself, it is no mean feat. Whatever GMA's reasons for it, her decision to step down after her term remains an inspired one.

I will not repeat at length again the wisdom of her not running again. Suffice it to say here that with it, she jettisons much of the baggage that has been sinking the ship of state. At the very least, it frees her to obey the mandate of Edsa II, which is to bring Erap to justice. She need no longer fear being rejected by his minions in 2004.

I've said repeatedly that if only GMA had forsworn the next elections, she could have become the best president we ever had, the unelected president who undid the harm wreaked by the one who had the biggest electoral mandate of all, the true president who rose above self for country. It may be a little late in the day to become so, particularly given the circumstances in which GMA has made her decision, but it's not too late for her to go a year and a half from now with head held high. Her act may not resonate with *gloria*, but it at least bespeaks of *gracia*. It's sin and redemption, a theme that never fails to tug at the Filipino heart.

I did say in a column on Aug. 8 last year: "I have no beef with GMA personally. She says today that she will not run at all, that she will only do everything in her power to arrest the decline of this country, to stop its best and brightest from leaving it out of frustration and disgust, that she will not allow herself to be put in a position where she will fear others or be beholden to them, and this very minute she can count on my undying support." I am a man of my word. I may have to qualify "undying" though. I will not go so far as to support her "war against terror." But who knows? Maybe after forswearing the elections, GMA might find her way as well to not dragging the country to hell to please the Americans.

Stranger things have been known to happen. Right now, I wish her a happy new year.

GMA now free to make tough decisions—Drilon

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

LAST Tuesday, Dec. 31, Sen. John Osmeña called from Boracay to tell me that my column that morning was "out of sync." He said that if anyone could give a blow-by-blow account of the events leading to President Macapagal-Arroyo's decision to bow out of the 2004 race, it would be me, but my column was about the bombing of the Marcos bust. I laughed and told him my vaunted Palace connections existed only in his imagination. I said that last Dec. 30, I wrote my column very early as I had to take a *balikbayan* brother and his family to Tagaytay, so I didn't hear GMA's announcement. In fact I only learned about it when Speaker Jose de Venecia called me from Pangasinan. He also learned about it only from the media and like the rest of the nation, he was also stunned by it.

* * *

I found JDV's admission that he didn't know about GMA's plan in advance quite incredible, given his close alliance with his former running mate. The Speaker, who is on the phone with GMA sometimes several times a day, related that he had spoken with her on the phone the night before her Rizal Day speech and she had given him no inkling of her plan. JDV admitted, though, that the Palace had been mulling it as an option for 2004. I had also heard of it but I didn't think she'd ever do it.

Last Tuesday, I dropped by Senate President Franklin Drilon's residence in Greenhills, San Juan, to discuss the political ramifications of GMA's decision. He also found it hard to believe the House leader had no inkling of GMA's plan, but he confessed that he himself was not aware of it. In fact he first heard about it from the President's political adviser, Joey Rufino, during the Luneta flag-raising ceremony. Drilon asked Rufino to verify the report and, as he recalled, Rufino came back pale as a sheet and confirmed the news. The Senate chief then quickly ordered a rewrite of his New Year message to conform with the new reality.

* * *

By now the whole nation knows that the President had kept her plan so secret that only First Gentleman Mike Arroyo, the President's brother Diosdado Macapagal Jr. and First Daughter Luli Arroyo knew about it. But if there were others outside this intimate circle who ought to have known, logically it would have been her two close allies in Congress, the chiefs of its two chambers. But that was not the case. The secrecy tells a lot about the President's strength of character as well as a perceived weakness: her inability to adequately communicate.

* * *

Some pundits opine that such a far-reaching decision ought to have been discussed by GMA with at least the top leaders of Lakas and the ruling coalition. But I think GMA didn't want to be distracted in making this all-important decision.

Her surprise decision has "scrambled" the opposition's plans, Osmeña admitted. In fact, there's speculation that it's the opposition and not the administration coalition that will be fighting over slots in the 2004 ticket.

One thing is certain: GMA must have prayed well before making her decision. I recall that at the birthday party of Tony Abaya, who's often better known as the husband of FVR's spokesperson Anabelle Abaya, GMA told this columnist that during the daily Mass she attends, she asks God to help her overcome formidable problems, "since You put me in this job." Just as all the poisonous attacks against her affected her badly, now that she has renounced her ambition, the President is said to look "*parang nabunutan ng tinik*" (as if a thorn had been removed from her side). De Venecia, who recently met with her over dinner in Baguio and who will escort her on a visit today to the fishponds and fish-tanks of Pangasinan, feels she is "being guided by the Holy Spirit" in her moves.

* * *

After the announcement, the question on everyone's mind is: What will GMA do to strengthen her hand in order to avoid being a lame-duck president? How can she effect reforms in a year and a half's time?

Drilon feels that this is now the golden opportunity for GMA to "go for the tough decisions" since that is what makes a republic strong and, of course, avoid being a lame duck. Drilon advises her to face the opposition "eyeball to eyeball." I queried him what those tough decisions are, and he opined that for starters, GMA ought to reform and overhaul the Bureau of Internal Revenue and improve revenue collections. Drilon says GMA should now be "issue-specific" and bring those tough decisions "directly to the people."

* * *

Osmeña described GMA's decision as "courageous" but warned that the situation remains iffy. "Can she follow up her resolve with the tough decisions?" he asked. Osmeña also wanted to see the BIR overhauled and some Cabinet members replaced. The senator also predicted that the move to change the Charter would go full blast now that GMA has renounced any plan to seek election. He said he would commit himself wholeheartedly to this move, working specifically for a shift to federalism. Osmeña is counted among the nine senators batting for Charter change—still fewer than the 18 votes needed, but already a big leap from zero just two months ago.

* * *

On Jan. 10, the President will finally sign the Special Purpose Assets Vehicle Law, which is expected to release some P600 million in bank non-performing loans and raise $5 billion in equity. Also to be relaunched will be the Electronic Procurement Law which is expected to result in huge savings on government purchases. On Jan. 18 or 19 the summit of political parties and civil society groups will be held and it is expected to launch the government of national unity. There's talk that two Cabinet posts will go to nominees of the opposition LDP and the Nationalist People's Coalition.

We can stop it

AT LARGE

Rina Jimenez-David

HERE'S the conclusion of the "state of the Philippine environment" report by Lory Tan of World Wildlife Fund Philippines.

In yesterday's installment, Tan pointed out the crisis the country is facing. In his conclusion, Tan offers a prescription to delay, if not stave off completely, the crisis that is upon us.

* * *

WE WILL not solve these problems by throwing money at them. Unless corruption is dramatically stopped and governance improves significantly, we cannot expect an appropriate level of social services and government programs to trickle down to the broad voter/taxpayer base—many of whom are poor. Corruption is a reflection of weak leadership and mismanagement. It wastes limited public resources and allows inefficiency. It is, therefore, bad economics.

We must make a sincere national effort to protect the environment and arrest all those who continue to enrich themselves through environmental crime: those whose businesses pollute and poison others, those financiers who victimize untenured and jobless forest dwellers to log away our watersheds, those who knowingly blast, poison and destroy the oceanic cradles that serve as home and haven to the food that is being counted upon to nourish future generations of Filipinos. Patronage politics must stop. Those in government who intervene on behalf of environmental criminals are accomplices. They, too, must be held accountable.

All this must be done because, through more than three decades, government has continued to fail to meet the expectations of its greater taxpayer base. The general perception is that government has not delivered value for money. Taxpayers do not ask for much. We simply want what we pay for. Is that unreasonable? When government fails, the environment is the only social security system for the poor. If, in spite of its bloated, expensive bureaucracy, government still cannot deliver the services it is paid to provide, it must, at least, give its disappointed clientele a fighting chance to save themselves.

Taking all factors into consideration, the Philippines will slam into critical mass within the next decade. We don't have much time.

* * *

UNLESS consistent, sustainable, high impact solutions are set in place nationwide, our forests and watersheds, barely five percent of what they were a century ago, will disappear. No forests? No water. No water? No rice. No crops? No development. The water wars plaguing Africa may find their way here. Air quality will continue to deteriorate, leading to sudden increases in disease, physical and cognitive dysfunction, as well as a new assortment of endocrine system disorders that result in an inability to thrive. Tragically, children will be hit first.

Our remaining coral reefs, mangrove forests and seagrass beds will suffocate from siltation, toxics and the effects of climate change. Unabated sedimentation could aggravate sea level rise, leading to saltwater intrusion in rivers, estuaries as well as coastal towns and agricultural areas. Primary predator populations will have been reduced to levels so low that they can no longer effectively influence the health of our marine and forest ecosystems. Forest biodiversity, and therefore viability, will tip past recoverable levels. The remnants of our oceanic food chain will crash. Our population will break 100 million. The spiral will be swift and vicious. All this will happen as a result of misplaced priorities and poorly-managed human activity.

I am not asking you to believe me. I am asking if, for your children's sake, you would rather be safe, or sorry.

* * *

THE solutions exist. We have most of the policy and legal framework in place. They must be implemented and allowed to work, through local initiatives, authentic multi-sectoral partnerships and community-based efforts—without disruption from the annoying intramurals of the political elite. It is that simple.

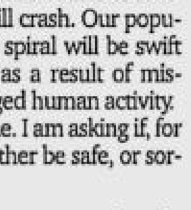
We know how to restore forests and watersheds. We know how to rehabilitate reefs and rebuild fish stocks. We know that both power plant and vehicular emissions must be rigidly regulated; and that further investments in nuclear, coal and fossil fuel plants must never again be allowed. We know that we must stop poisoning our soil, water and air with non-biodegradeable insecticides, pesticides and industrial effluents. We know that all protected areas are critical for the sustenance of human life as we know it, and that all illegal activity in these vital conservation sites is tantamount to sabotage against the future of our own children. All we have to do is to uniformly uphold the law. It is that simple.

Let's do something about it.

Let us build a national consensus on the environment that will give birth to and fuel the political will to uphold the rule of law and the will of the people. Let us assemble a national database, available to all, describing sustainable solutions that have been tried and tested. All sectors must put their money down and get involved. All initiatives must be managed professionally, focusing on hard results rather than mere activity. Let us put aside turf battles. Let us teach each other. Let us learn from each other. And for once, let us agree on something fundamental that will profoundly affect all of us. It may require major changes in mindset and in the way we live our lives. However, it is good economics. It is also good politics. It is for the good of all Filipinos, today and tomorrow. It is that simple.

We started it. We can stop it. We must.

Child soldiers (II)



HUMAN FACE

Ma. Ceres P. Doyo

A FORMER child soldier speaks: "Most of us were 21 years old and below. Out of 80 people I think there were 30 of us. I met a number of children when I was with the armed group. Most of those who died or were injured during encounters were 18 years old and below. They were usually students from the cities or children like me."

According to the Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Children as Soldiers, a child soldier is defined as "any person under 18 who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity not limited to combatants." The coalition adds that the children most likely to become child soldiers are those from impoverished and marginalized communities and families or are separated from their families. Many of these so-called child soldiers are male adolescents, although in recent years there has been an increase in the number of girl soldiers. Young girls are recruited also for sexual purposes and many enter into forced marriages.

There are child soldiers in the Philippines. Cases have been documented in areas where armed anti-government groups like the communist New People's Army, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Abu Sayyaf are active. Children from indigenous groups are reported to have been recruited by the Cordillera People's Liberation Army in the north and by armed lumad groups in the south. Government-supported paramilitary groups are said to have recruited children for military training.

In more than 80 countries worldwide, the coalition reported, there are an estimated 300,000 children under 18 who have either willingly joined or been forcibly made to join government armed forces, paramilitary and armed opposition groups to become frontline soldiers, couriers, spies or even sexual slaves.

Many live in harsh and dangerous situations, suffer from physical and mental abuse and face the danger of being killed in armed encounters. Many too are the children who receive military training and undergo indoctrination at a very young age.

In the last three decades, there has been a steady rise in the number of child soldiers. Light high-tech weapons are increasingly more available for them. This, despite universal legislation for the protection of children and the global condemnation of the recruitment of child soldiers.

In October 2000, the Philippines ratified the International Labor Organization Convention 182(ILO 182) which condemns forced or compulsory recruitment of children below 18 for armed combat as one of the worst forms of child labor. The Philippines has since passed laws to protect children.

Republic Act 7610, known as the Special Protection of Children Against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act, declares children as "zones of peace." Children are not to be targets of aggression, they should not be recruited for combat. RA 7610 sets the minimum age for recruitment at 18. It provides rules and regulations for the treatment of rescued or surrendered child soldiers. These children are to be provided quarters separate from adult detainees. Their parents are to be notified immediately and within 24 hours, these children should be placed in the custody of the Department of Social Welfare and Development or any responsible member of the community.

RA 8371 prohibits the recruitment of children of indigenous cultural communities into armed groups.

A memorandum of agreement dated March 2000 between the military, police and other government agencies provides for the proper treatment of rescued child soldiers. It requires that they be given immediate medical attention especially if they are wounded children, plus psychological treatment if necessary. The agreement prohibits the presentation of child soldiers to the media for propaganda purposes. These children are to be viewed as victims rather than offenders.

In April 2002, the Senate ratified the Optional Protocols in the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. In May 2000, the UN General Assembly adopted the Optional Protocols pertaining to children in armed conflict. The Philippines signed in September 2000.

Recruitment of child soldiers is a public concern. It is a human rights issue since it violates the child's fundamental rights as provided by the Constitution and the UN Convention on the Rights of Children. It is a health issue because it has grave consequences on the physical and mental health of child soldiers, especially those who are wounded and traumatized by rape and unwanted pregnancies. It is also a developmental issue because it affects the child's normal development which should be within the security of a peaceful family and community.

And most of all, this is a peace issue. Child soldiers could grow up believing that violence is the only solution. The use of child soldiers perpetuates the culture of violence.

Violence the present generation of children have been exposed to: real-life situations, the media, through toys and games, within the confines of the family, in the surrounding environment, and worse, in the violent behavior, language and signals of their supposed protectors and leaders.

Listen to the simple words of a former child soldier: "When I think about it—that I might have killed someone—I feel afraid, uneasy and guilty. If I did shoot anybody, I feel sorry for them."

We must lift the burden that children carry.

A bountiful year 2003 to all! May we become mirrors of the compassion and kindness of God.

* * *

Send comments to cerespd@info.com.ph

A cruel joke

MY philosophy is that I might die at any moment. The tragedy is that, I didn't. —Marla Singer in "Fight Club"

WHEN I saw the billboard along Edsa of a man and a woman kissing, I knew at that exact moment that I was missing something. Missing something, according to my own understanding of the term, doesn't exactly signify that I had it before. I missed that particular thing because I never had that experience.

I refused to look at the billboard any further. I was offended by it. The ad seemed to rub in the fact that some people never had that kind of intimacy in their lifetime. A picture of a man and a woman holding hands would have been more tolerable. But I guess, the advertisers want to attract attention and, yes, they were very successful. In fact, they were so good that they offended some people like me who looked at the billboard.

YOUNG BLOOD

Jeffrey P. Yap

We want to know what the young are thinking about. What are their thoughts on current issues? We welcome contributions from the twentysomething and below.—Ed.

But I am not trying to make anyone feel sorry for me and my total inexperience. This is more of an expression of outrage over the injustice of never ever experiencing true love in my lifetime.

I cannot accept that I will never have the pleasure of having someone cuddle me inside an MRT coach. As far as I know, there is such a thing as a superficial love affair: no commitment, no emotional baggage to carry, in case the other party decides to leave. I thought I could have that kind of love anytime and anywhere.

I decided to begin my search for Ms Right at that very moment on the MRT. I had 10 minutes. I would start at the Guadalupe station and end at the Taft Avenue station—a total of four stations. If my search for a superficial significant other failed, that would be a sign that I was fated not to have even a superficial love.

I began my search on the left side, two seats away from me. A nice-looking, petite girl in her twenties wearing a blue dress with cornflower prints was my first prospect. She was reading a novel by Sidney Sheldon. Hmmm...a girl who loves to read. Not bad. My cousin told me once that if a girl read Sidney Sheldon, she must be adventurous, impulsive and passionate.

I actually prayed to the Creator of the blazing sun burning my skin at that moment that the lovely girl in a blue dress was impulsive. A girl who never gave a damn and had as her philosophy in life was "Carpe diem." If she was a hedonist, so much the better. Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow you die. Better still, get a boyfriend in two minutes for tomorrow you die—happy.

I began ogling her. It was actually a tough thing to do because my steady stare could either be rewarded with a glance or she just hit me on the face with the book she was reading. But I took the risk. For one minute, I was just staring at her. There was no reaction from her, no sign that she liked the attention she was getting.

I ended my eye contact with Ms Sidney Sheldon and began looking for my second prospect. This time, it was an older woman in front of me.

But hey, cast away your malicious thoughts. She was not a candidate for sugar mommy. She was actually quite attractive with her long legs, nice hair, full lips and eyes which reminded me of poodle's that was waiting for her food. With her make-up which was just right, she was no red hot mama but simply one attractive and interesting lady.

She held her red bag as if afraid that someone might grab it any minute. I adored the way her eyes moved across the windows, as the glare of the sun ricocheted off the safety handles. When she squinted, my knees began to wobble.

I smiled at her and attempted to create a sparkle in my eyes, hoping that she would return the compliment. My efforts were not wasted. She looked at me but her stare was more like what a mother gives to her son. I bet she was thinking that I needed motherly love. It was not that I didn't want it but it was not what I expected from her. I felt that she was willing to hug me for some reason. Was there something wrong with the way I looked at her?

My efforts were going nowhere. I looked at the empty buildings that we were passing by. I was only two stations away from the end of the railway. I was losing hope. Perhaps using the MRT as a venue for my search for Ms Superficial was a bad idea. My options were limited. I should have picked a bar instead. But I had tried that before and I wasn't able to hook anyone. I had also tried bookstores, yoga classes, cooking classes, dance lessons and support groups without any success.

I laid my last bet on the nice girl beside me. Save the best for last. She was burdened with shopping bags and groceries and she looked cute with her eyeglasses and her dimples. Her face was round, her cheeks were rosy, and she was quite chubby but that didn't matter because her smile was something to die for.

I think there's something about women's smiles that kill me. I suspect that it is their way to a man's heart aside from his big belly.

The Close-up Smile Girl smiled at me. My prayers were answered. I just needed to say something to make my initial approach. "Sweet Jesus, I'm in the mood for love!" "I have so much to give. I need someone who will take them." "You remind me of my mother." "You look like a Tequila gal." Every phrase that I memorized from a guidebook for guys on love and life was rushing through my mind, like tadpoles swimming out of the canal, awaiting their transformation into a big green frog ready to be kissed by a beautiful princess.

But I must have been the frog cursed to remain a frog. I didn't get a kiss from Ms Close-up Smile. When I smiled at her, she frowned and held tightly the hand of the man beside her. Her boyfriend.

When we reached Taft Avenue station, I knew my search was over. Ms Sidney Sheldon, Ms Hot Mama, and Ms Close-up Smile would go into my list of objects of my unsuccessful attempts at having a love that is easy to get.

As I stepped down from the train, I remembered something a close friend told me: My life was a cruel joke. I was funny, smart, romantic, responsible, and I could get away with anything, but there was one thing I couldn't have—romantic love.

I refused to believe her. I said she was just couple-oriented and that for her the measure of true happiness was having someone to cling on to.

A romantic conquest wouldn't be an assurance of a happy life. However, the thought of not having a girlfriend makes me mad and makes me wish I were dead.

I was near the ticket booth when a woman wearing eyeglasses smiled at me. She was saying something that I couldn't comprehend. I approached her, and saw her braided hair resting on her shoulders. Her eyes twitched and she bit her lip. "*Namumukhaan kita, may butas ka kasi sa baba, eh!*" she told me.

"Cleft chin *ito!*" I snapped. Then I turned around, and kept cursing my fate the whole afternoon.

Jeffrey P. Yap, 24, is studying for his master's degree in English Studies at the University of the Philippines in Diliman.

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Ideal resolutions for the new year

FOR LAWMAKERS:
I'll cut my session absences in half
And set a good example for my si
I'll quit grandstanding and just wear a smile
While I perform my role in low profile
I'll keep in mind that Congress' turf is legislation,
Not the thrill of criminal investigation.
For a government bureau chief:
I'll distance bureau work from politics,
For politicking and performance do not mix.
I'll shield my office force against intrigue
By elements from some elusive league
I'll cleanse my desk of all red tape
Or risk impatient public wrath I can't escape.
For a city policeman:
If in my beat a big shot starts a fray,
I shall not look the other way.
In short, henceforth I'll act as duty calls
No matter where the big axe falls
And for bribes my palm will never be extended
So relax now, jeepney driver pal: my "*kotong*" days are ended.

—ENRIQUE CLAUDIO JR.
Alpha Subdivision, Quezon City

Wish list for 2003 and beyond

1. FOR all Filipinos to humble themselves and accept their share of culpability for the sad state of affairs of our country, specifically "for allowing politics to be debased and prostituted to the low level it is in now" either directly or indirectly or by commission or omission; and to acknowledge that the root cause of what ails our country is moral or spiritual.

2. For all Filipinos to make a personal decision to change their approach to politics and to make it an effective means for integral development for all rather than a tool for the advancement of a privileged few.

3. For all Filipinos to pursue a new kind of politics that is focused more on moral principles than political expediency, more on the needs of the poor and vulnerable than the interests of the rich and the powerful, more on the pursuit of the common good than the demands of special interests, more on the culture of life than the culture of death and violence.

4. For the "trapos" who served during the term of President Marcos, Aquino, Ramos, Estrada and Macapagal-Arroyo to retire and give way to young blood whose thoughts and ways are different from theirs.

5. For all Filipinos to pursue in word and deed, peace that is based on love, justice, reconciliation, active nonviolence and progressive disarmament—not the peace that is based on armaments.

6. For the government and all Filipinos to work for the restoration of the dignity of and respect for the Filipino all over the world; that the name Filipino will become synonymous with everything or anything that is good.

7. For all Filipinos to follow the Golden Rule: "Treat others as you would have them treat you," or "That which displease you do not do to others."

8. For everyone to praise good manners and right conduct.

9. For every Filipino to experience life in its fullness and to make his/her life a gift to God and to others.

10. For every Filipino to remember that the common good is common sense, and that the highest form of realism is still idealism.

—NANDY PACHECO
Kapatiran sa Pangkalahatang Kabutihan (Kapatiran)
4th Floor, Cacho-Gonzales Bldg.
101 Aguirre St., Legaspi Village
Makati City

The real threat to movie industry

SINCE Sunday, Dec. 29, the INQUIRER has featured the "walkout" of Lualhati Bautista that "marred" the Metro Manila Film Festival Philippines and then zeroed in on the judges' choices, followed by a whole-page review written by Lito Zulueta proclaiming "Dekada '70" as the festival's best film.

Then last Jan.1, Laurice Guillen was quoted as saying that the movie industry was hurting and pleading for everyone to "stop the pain." While the story noted that the production crew of the MMFFP awards ceremony had publicly apologized for the failure to announce Lualhati Bautista's name among the nominees for Best Story, Guillen and Chino Roño were quoted as criticizing Caloocan City Mayor Ray Malonzo for saying that next time he would get judges from the "common *tao*." Johnny Delgado also alleged that Malonzo wanted to choose judges that he could "control."

But why not indeed let the "common *tao*", a cigarette vendor, "a denizen of Dagat-dagatan," the movie-going *masa* who have enabled the Filipino film industry to survive be the judge? A good film will not fail to get the nod of anybody, be he/she a cigarette vendor or a "stalwart of the industry."

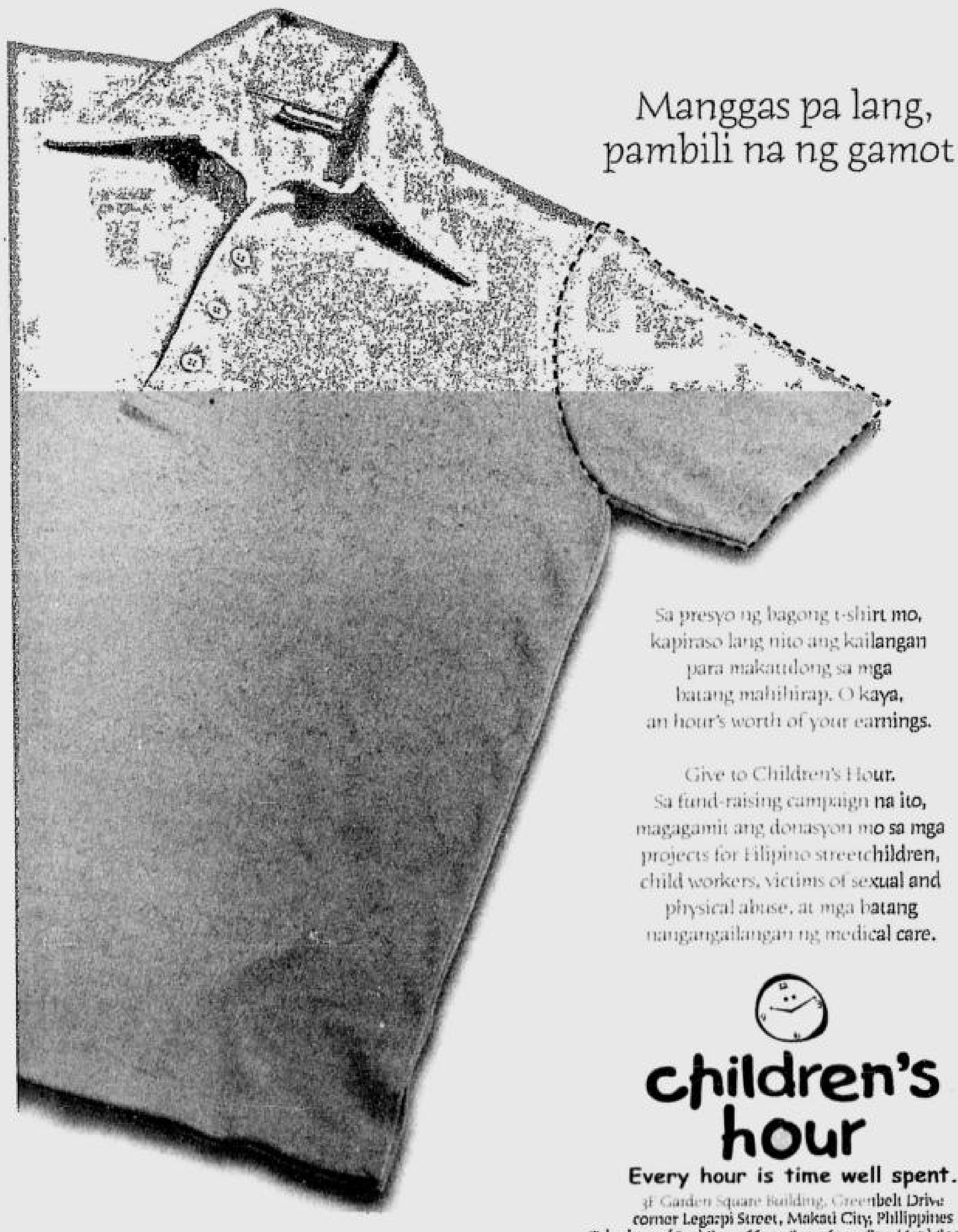
Malonzo would be punishing the industry if he did this, said Guillen. But the real threat to the industry are the unprofessional members who persist in putting down their fellow members.

As for my qualifications as a judge, I was taken in by the Festival Committee as a member of the environmentalist groups Bangon Kalikasan, UP Against Toxics, Zero Waste Recycling Movement and as a print and broadcast journalist, not because I could be controlled. I do not allow anybody to dictate on me. I have also written scripts for the movies, television and stage, some of which have won awards, including the Palanca literary contests. I was also a political prisoner during the real Dekada '70, as well as a descendant of a pure Chinese from the mainland.

My fellow judges are respected professionals in their own right and are among the most active and critical moviegoers.

I am confident of my choices, but I will let the critical viewers, especially, the *masa*, confirm or disprove my choices and those of my fellow judges.

—JOEY C. PAPA
idelon1@skyinet.net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From politics to morality

PINOY KASI

Michael L. Tan

THE NATION now waits, wondering if the new year will mean the emergence of a presidency of substance, one where governance takes over from politics. If indeed the President does not intend to run in 2004, then we should expect this governance to be based on ethics and morality, rather than on political expediency and opportunism.

Let's face it though: she will have only about a year and a half to prove her mettle at governance. That's much too short a period for any dramatic reforms, but I thought there would be at least three areas where she can prove that she can set a model for governance.

The first issue that comes to my mind is Iraq, and the need for the Philippines to remain neutral. In the two years she has been president, Ms Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has acquired a reputation, locally and internationally, of being too subservient to the Bush administration, what with her offers of our air space, military bases and even soldiers for Bush's wars. This subservience has been interpreted as a move to ensure political survival, a need to project herself as America's anointed one to stave off local coup threats. But the fact is that in many parts of the world, and even within the United States, support for Bush's wars has faltered. Fears of a war in Iraq have adversely affected the global economy, with investors unwilling to put in new money into businesses. The stark statistics are in as well on dismal consumer spending during the last holidays: people are hanging on to their money in these uncertain times, and that is bad for business. When the developed countries sneeze, we get pneumonia. Our already anemic economy threatens to turn comatose with the war jitters. Business people are wary, seeing how, among Asian countries, we are even one of the most vulnerable to attacks from radical Islamicists because of the way we are identified as America's lap dog in a war that is seen as a jihad—Bush's jihad—against Muslims.

The problems don't end with domestic instability. Given that a full-scale assault on Iraq will affect the entire Middle East region, thousands of Filipino overseas workers in that area now risk losing not just their jobs but their lives. Beyond these strategic considerations, the President would do well to distance herself from a war with Iraq purely on moral grounds. There is little to justify the aggression against Iraq, which has suffered for more than a decade now in an undeclared war, with the United States and Britain conducting periodic air raids against that country. Saddam Hussein is a ruthless despot but one important reason he remains in power is that he can point out how the country is under siege from the outside. Political analysts predict that if war is finally formally declared, Saddam will bring the fighting into the densely populated cities, in effect using Iraqi civilians as hostages. The Philippines cannot be a party to that carnage.

A second area where the President can prove her ability to govern is to revive the now moribund family planning program. The deterioration of local family planning programs is not based on a Catholic doctrinal battle between "natural" and "artificial" family planning. No, the battle is political, with the President trying to keep in the good graces of the Catholic hierarchy and ending up on the side of a fringe group of ultra-conservative Catholics who reject family planning, arguing that a large population is good for the economy because it means more consumers, more business, even more workers to export.

As an economist, Gloria should know better. There is just no way government or the private sector can cope with the demands for jobs, housing, health, education and other social services, not with the present rate of population growth. As for exporting Filipinos as caregivers to the world, I find it terribly immoral that we can think of producing children mainly because we see them as possible exports to bring in dollars later, even as we export their parents today.

A third area where Gloria needs to bite the bullet is that of abolishing the death penalty. Here she has been indecisive, proclaiming her opposition to capital punishment and yet qualifying that maybe the lethal injections should be kept for kidnappers. Again, she has tried to please the Catholic bishops—who are officially opposed to the death penalty—even while playing to the false hopes of a desperate public, who are convinced, in part because of her own statements that executions will deter crime.

The death penalty issue relates again to morality in many ways. Who are we to take the moral high ground, demanding that foreign governments stop executing Filipinos abroad, when we continue to do this at home? And what does the death penalty do in terms of shaping the Filipino's sense of right and wrong, as we reinforce a primitive sense of morality where people behave only because of their fear of punishment?

Finally, given our terribly flawed "justice" system, the death penalty can mean many erroneous convictions and executions. Late last year we saw how five innocent men accused in the Rolando Abadilla assassination were sent to death row, based on confessions extracted through torture, and through the mistaken testimony of Abadilla's own son. Fortunately, a terrible miscarriage of justice was averted, but that case reminds us that the death penalty is all too easily meted out to innocent men and women, usually the poor.

While the President's remaining term is too short to deal with the root causes of criminality—from poverty to corruption—she should at least firmly declare that the death penalty will not bring peace and order. Not only that, she must declare, unequivocally, that capital punishment is itself criminal and unjust.

The three issues I just described constitute a simple agenda to challenge the President on her vow to lead and to govern. She must be clear, now, about her own personal views on ethics and morality, and how these positions shape her governance. Perhaps the President truly believes it is in the Philippines' best interests to remain tied to the Bush government's apron strings or that a large population is the engine to economic growth, or that the death penalty does deter crime. If those indeed are her convictions, then she must come out and say so. That done, she can let history be the judge.

A gambit to push charter change?

PRESIDENT Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's decision not to run in the 2004 presidential elections may be seen either as selfless act of statesmanship or a brilliant strategy for staying in power longer. Most, I believe, will give her the benefit of the doubt and praise her decision. I would rather withhold judgment and look at some interesting possibilities.

With her extremely popular decision, GMA is now in a position to implement unpopular but necessary moves, which is exactly how the decision will be seen.

One of these moves can be amending the Constitution, which presidents like Fidel Ramos and Joseph Estrada wanted to do. Now, little opposition can be expected if a constituent assembly is called to fast-track the drafting of a new constitution.

Such an assembly can now institute what many political scientists have long wanted us to try: a parliamentary system with an executive selected from among the legislators. With the threat of a hugely popular presidential candidate and actor like Fernando Poe, Jr., looming on the horizon, there will be wide support for a parliamentary system among presidential aspirants and businessmen because it will probably close the door to a neophyte but popular candidate like Poe.

A charter change assembly will also enable globalists in the government, including GMA herself, to do what they've been itching to do for a long time: to remove the remaining nationalist provisions in the Constitution and enshrine the globalist paradigm. They may, for good measure, likewise take out those remnants of progressive ideas which people power forces managed to insert in the Constitution, like the anti-foreign bases provision, the provisions protecting human and civil rights, land reform and ancestral domain.

With a parliamentary system in place and as a president who made some popular decisions, GMA can easily win the election in her home district and put herself in line to become the country's first prime minister—this time without any term limit.

No matter how things turn out, GMA's move has shown her to be a master political strategist.

Truly 2003 will be a very interesting year.

—ROBERTO VERSOLA
108 V. Luna Road Ext.,
Sikatuna Village, Quezon City

Waiting for GMA's policy speech

THE announcement that President Arroyo is not seeking the presidency in 2004 is, by itself, meaningless. It will become meaningful only if translated into concrete policies and programs which decisively address the nation's fundamental problems: poverty and injustice.

If in her scheduled address to the nation on Jan. 6 President Macapagal-Arroyo spells out the policies and programs and henceforth pursues them without let-up, no matter who stands in the way, her announcement will acquire epochal significance.

So let us retain our enthusiasm for or against the announcement and wait until Jan. 6.

—AMADO GAT INCIONG
145 15th avenue, Cubao, Quezon City

(The President yesterday cancelled her speech on Jan. 6 —Ed.)

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The WORLD

Editor Luverne B. Gueco

2003 ushered in amid tight security

NEW YORK—New Year's Eve revelers around the world partied amid tight security, but the celebrations were marred by a fireworks explosion in Mexico reported to have killed at least 28 people.

Hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers—estimates ranged up to one million—and tourists gathered to see the famous ball drop at midnight in Times Square without incident.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg and disabled actor Christopher Reeve officiated at the dropping of the ball. Reeve's wife, Dana, held his hand as he sat in a wheelchair and she and the mayor pushed the miniature ball to start the huge crystal ball downward.

Bloomberg had assured New Yorkers that Times Square, often called the crossroads of the world, would be secure for them.

The US Coast Guard closed New York harbor to private pleasure boats, and the police increased harbor patrols in response to what Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly called an "uncorroborated" threat of a terror attack in the harbor.

In Mexico, Televisa television network reported that an explosion and fire in a street market packed with fireworks stalls had killed 28 people and injured more than 50 in the port city of Veracruz. The first count of the dead was 15, but more bodies were found as additional buildings were searched.

"This is not the first time this has happened in Mexico or in Veracruz . . . We are all responsible, let this serve as an example," the television quoted senior Veracruz municipal official Jose Ramon Gutierrez as saying.

Bloomberg's assurances of a safe New Year's Eve came as the FBI hunted five men believed to have entered the United States illegally and wanted for questioning as part of the US-declared war on terror after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks.

All of New York's half-million or more revelers had to pass through metal detectors. Otherwise, normal precautions were taken with thousands of extra police on duty, mailboxes and trash cans removed and manhole covers welded shut.

In a New Year message from his ranch in Crawford, Texas, US President George W. Bush vowed to "secure America, win the war on terrorism, focus on education, promote compassion, create new jobs and ensure the economic security of all our citizens."

Bush's closest ally, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, however, warned in his New Year message of dangerous times ahead, from the confrontation with Iraq to the threat of terror and the lack of progress on the Middle East peace process.

"I cannot recall a time when Britain was confronted, simultaneously, by such a range of difficult and in some cases dangerous problems," Blair said.

While there were no warnings of any specific terrorist attacks, police in the world's major cities worked overtime to reassure the public that celebrations would be unmarred by terrorist violence.

With memories still fresh of the Bali bombings that killed more than 180 people in October, two-thirds of Indonesia's police force were deployed around the world's biggest Muslim nation, guarding shopping and entertainment centers, mosques, churches and public facilities.

In the capital, Jakarta, key roads were closed for a street party, but despite widespread tight security thousands of Indonesians turned out to see in 2003.

Even though their fabled tourist industry was devastated by the October blasts, Balinese put on a brave face at New Year's Eve festivities on the famous Kuta Beach, just blocks away from where two bombs ripped through a number of nightclubs.

In Sydney, police imposed security not seen since the 2000 Sydney Olympics, banning cars from the central business district and blocking streets for a party that culminated in a massive fireworks display over the harbor.

After a year of drought, bush fires, the Bali bombings that killed up to 90 Australians and talk of terrorism, Sydney Lord Mayor Frank Sartor praised Sydneysiders for having the courage to party openly.

"They didn't listen to the doomsayers; we didn't listen to the malcontents; we went on and celebrated and had a great party," he said of the celebration, which attracted a smaller crowd than expected at 700,000.

On the other side of the world, an extra 1,000 policemen were deployed in Paris, bringing the total to around 5,500.

Cars were banned around the capital's famed Champs Elysees, where up to 300,000 revelers were expected.

Security fears have been heightened by arrests of suspected Islamist militants in and around Paris this month.

In Britain too, celebrations were overshadowed by fears of a possible terror strike. Scotland Yard said 2,000 police officers were patrolling London with antiterror squads on a heightened state of alert.

London's traditional outdoors party in Trafalgar Square, where 60,000 people usually celebrate, was canceled because of roadworks, so the bash moved indoors to the Millennium Dome, where 50,000 revelers danced in the New Year.

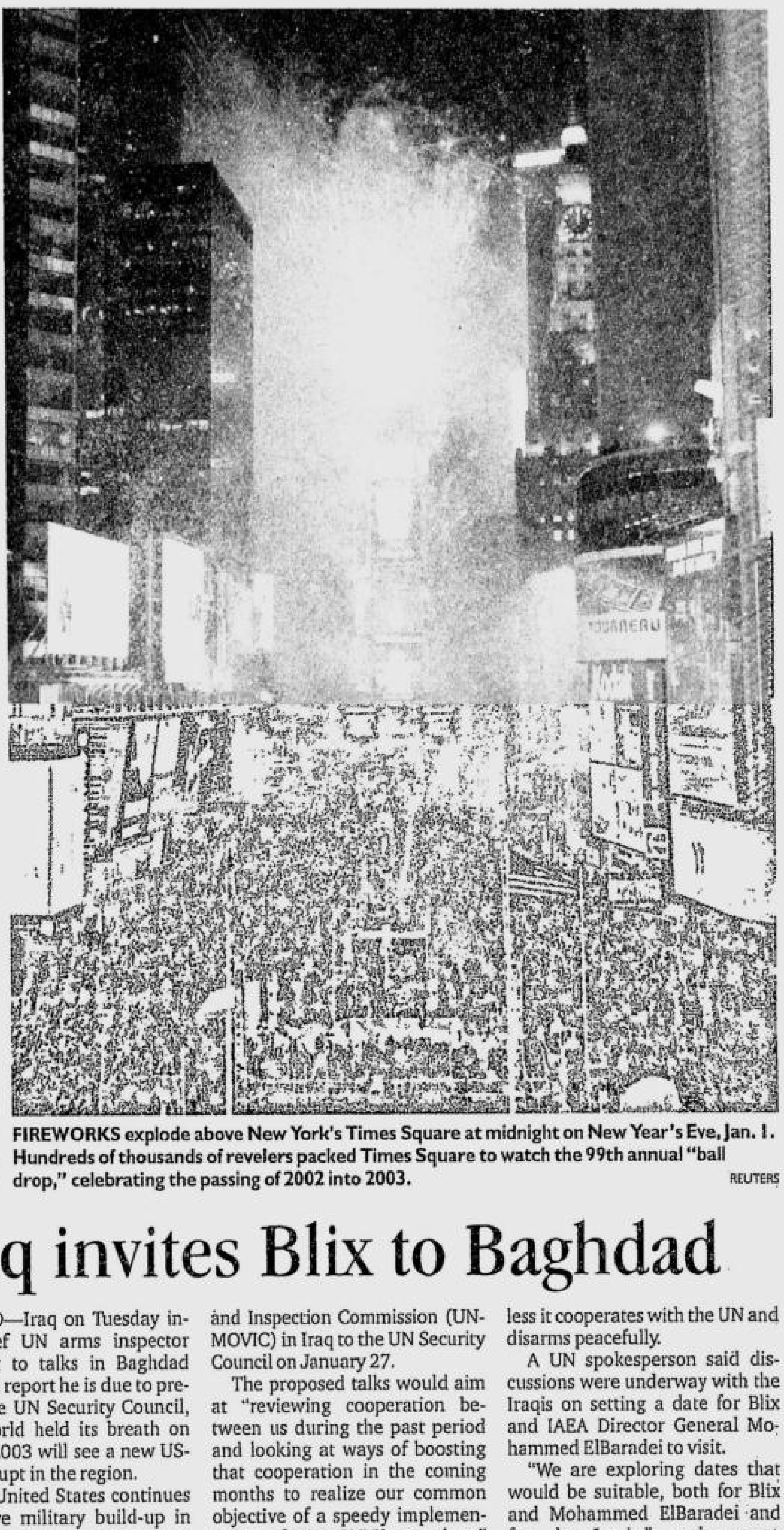
In Russia, 250,000 policemen patrolled the streets to prevent violence among tens of thousands of people partying outside despite the extreme cold.

Moscow's City Hall banned shops from selling alcohol in the town center to prevent drink-fueled violence, such as marred Russian soccer World Cup crowds in the summer.

In Berlin, about 1 million Germans marked the new year in a 2.5-km street party on both sides of the landmark Brandenburg Gate.

An anti-American candlelight vigil in Seoul, which organizers had predicted would attract one million brought only 12,000 to protest against the US military for the deaths of two girls killed in an accident by an American Army vehicle.

Outgoing Chinese President Jiang Zemin called for peaceful reunification with Taiwan in a brief New Year's Eve speech. *Reuters*



FIREWORKS explode above New York's Times Square at midnight on New Year's Eve, Jan. 1. Hundreds of thousands of revelers packed Times Square to watch the 99th annual "ball drop," celebrating the passing of 2002 into 2003.

REUTERS

SOUTH Korean army soldiers patrol a sensitive border area, Jan. 1, near the demilitarized zone which divides the Korean peninsula. Inter-Korean relations have come to a stalemate due to a stand-off over the North's nuclear weapons program.

AFP

Iraq invites Blix to Baghdad

BAGHDAD—Iraq on Tuesday invited chief UN arms inspector Hans Blix to talks in Baghdad ahead of a report he is due to present to the UN Security Council, as the world held its breath on whether 2003 will see a new US-led war erupt in the region.

As the United States continues its massive military build-up in the Gulf region, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said Iraq was cooperating with weapons inspectors and that an attack was not justified at this time.

Gen. Amer al-Saadi, a top advisor to President Saddam Hussein, sent Blix a letter proposing he come to Iraq "between the second and third week of January" to discuss cooperation between the two sides, the official INA news agency said.

Blix is due to report on the work of the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) in Iraq to the UN Security Council on January 27.

The proposed talks would aim at "reviewing cooperation between us during the past period and looking at ways of boosting that cooperation in the coming months to realize our common objective of a speedy implementation of UNMOVIC's mandate," Saadi wrote, according to the Arabic text carried by INA.

Together with the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), UNMOVIC resumed arms inspections in Iraq on November 27, nearly four years after UN arms experts left the country ahead of a US-British bombing campaign.

Baghdad has denied allegations that it has weapons of mass destruction.

The United States has threatened to disarm Iraq by force unless it cooperates with the UN and disarms peacefully.

A UN spokesperson said discussions were underway with the Iraqis on setting a date for Blix and IAEA Director General Mohammed ElBaradei to visit.

"We are exploring dates that would be suitable, both for Blix and Mohammed ElBaradei and for the Iraqis," spokesperson Ewen Buchanan said.

In his letter, Saadi said he wanted to discuss with Blix "any outstanding issues" and "creative ways" of resolving them.

He did not identify any particular outstanding issue. However, Baghdad has signaled it would be reluctant to allow its weapons scientists to be interviewed outside the country, as Washington has been pressing the inspectors to do under UN Resolution 1441, which gave them widespread powers. *AFP*

N. Korea vows to strengthen military

SEOUL—Famine-hit North Korea vowed Wednesday to build up military power in the coming year as US president George W. Bush said the escalating nuclear crisis could be solved peacefully.

Bush said a solution to the crisis with the Stalinist state Washington views as part of an 'axis of evil' could be found through diplomacy, stressing that the conflict was a not a military showdown.

"The North Korean situation is one that can be resolved peacefully through diplomacy," he said in comments to reporters at his ranch in Crawford, Texas.

Bush's comments came as North Korea unleashed a fresh wave of rhetoric via official media, vowing to beef up military strength in the coming year.

"Our party's revolutionary idea of giving top priority to the army is the most steadfast idea of independence against imperialism," North Korea's three state newspapers said in a joint New Year editorial.

The editorials have served as North Korea policy since former North Korean president 'Kim Il Sung died in 1994. The three newspapers represent North Korea's communist party, military and youth militia force.

Describing 2002 as the year for "hard struggle," the editorial urged North Koreans to keep themselves ready for their fight against "imperialism to the last."

"If (North Korea's) dignity and sovereignty are to be firmly defended, it is important to strengthen our revolutionary armed forces in every way and decisively enhance their militant might and role," it said.

All should "always keep themselves combat-ready" and do their utmost to increase "the national defense capacity, considering the military affair as the most important affair of the state," the editorial said.

"It is an urgent national task to avert the danger of war and preserve peace on the Korean peninsula at present," the editorial said, referring to the standoff over the North's decision to reactivate its mothballed nuclear program.

North Korea heightened the crisis Tuesday by expelling two inspectors from the United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which has been monitoring the country's nuclear facilities at Yongbyon, 90 km north of Pyongyang.

IAEA spokesperson Melissa Fleming said in Vienna: "There is a requirement, a need to monitor the North Korean activities . . . We have lost our eyes for the world to monitor the nuclear activities." But North Korea's ambassador to Moscow Pak Ui Chun warned his government could no longer honor the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) because the United States had threatened it with "a preventative nuclear strike."

Pyongyang had threatened to withdraw from the treaty in 1993, but the formal withdrawal was avoided with the signing of the Agreed Framework with the United States in 1994 under which the Yongbyon complex was mothballed.

North Korea's move to revitalize Yongbyon has triggered an angry response from the United States, which said it would pay "a serious price" in withheld international aid.

Washington has reportedly prepared a policy of "tailored containment" against North Korea, putting financial and political pressure on Pyongyang as the next step.

United States policy towards North Korea has been criticized by South Korean president-elect Roh Moo-Hyun. *AFP*

US urged to rethink aliens policy

WASHINGTON—Muslims, Arab-Americans, civil libertarians and others are urging federal officials to refrain from wholesale arrests if visitors from countries considered high risks for harboring terrorists fail to meet deadlines for registering with the US government.

Hundreds of people were detained in southern California two weeks ago when the registration deadline arrived for the first group of visa holders. That prompted angry demonstrations and a lawsuit against the federal government.

An official of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) said those arrests may dissuade others from coming forward.

Under a program enacted in response to the Sept. 11 attacks, some 24,200 men 16 and older from 20 countries are required to visit local Immigration and Naturalization Service offices to be photographed, fingerprinted and show certain documents. *AP*

'Frankenstein factor' sours confidence in gene science

PARIS—Until last week gene scientists were set to celebrate 2003 happily looking back to the birth of their discipline 50 years ago and looking ahead to further decades in which they would unlock and exploit DNA's secrets.

Today the mood has changed, suddenly darkened by the announcement last Friday by a secretive religious sect, the Raelians, that it had created the world's first human clone.

Reaction among scientists ranges from skepticism—the claim is supposedly being verified independently by samples taken from baby and mother—to revulsion at what is perceived as a risky and immoral experiment.

Dozens of studies involving mice and farm animals suggest current cloning technology is still primitive and knowledge of the human genome still very limited, and a cloned child could be condemned to an early grave or life as a cripple.

Even if the Raelians' claim proves to be bogus, that still will not stop the global race to produce the first human clone. The sect's main rival, maverick Italian gynecologist Severino Antinori, said in mid-December that a cloned baby will be born in Serbia in January.

It seems like a bad sci-fi movie, the kind that, for decades, has helped to nourish public suspicions about big science.

Only, this time, the nightmare script will have turned out to be true: rogue scientists craving fame or worshipping extraterrestrials have been dabbling with human life, tinkering away in secret labs unbothered by controls, laws, inspections or the threat of punishment.

It means that the "Frankenstein factor" which has dogged gene science for years, souring public confidence in genetically-modified crops and muddying the debate about genetic therapy, is back.

In the immediate wake of the Raelians' announcement, the United States, the European Union, Britain and France and other countries called for action to close loopholes over reproductive cloning.

Some experts wonder whether this is just the first step for a wider campaign that could wash over into other sectors where genes are manipulated in plants, farm animals and pharmaceuticals. *AFP*

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Bus workers barricade terminal in Lucena City

LUCENA CITY—As city residents welcomed the coming of year 2003 on Tuesday midnight, at least 40 striking workers of the JAC Liner Bus Company that plies the Lucena-Manila route barricaded the company terminal and depot in protest of the alleged non-compliance by the bus operator with their collective bargaining agreement.

Eight workers did not resist when the strikers just barged in and set up protest placards as barricades in front of the terminal compound in Barangay Gulang-Gulang in the outskirts of the city.

However, the protesting workers that belong to the JAC Liner Inc. Employees Union allowed the scabs to retrieve their personal belongings as well as the prepared food in the kitchen intended for the New Year's celebration.

Lopito Supillo, spokesperson of the protesting workers, said the protest action was a continuation of the strike that they started on Christmas Day in 2001.

"We've been staging this strike for more than a year now. And the company owner still continues to ignore our demand despite the agreements that they have signed with us under the collective bargaining agreement," he told the INQUIRER.

"We've reached a deadlock when the management refused to implement the ground rules," he added.

The protesting workers accused Jaime Chua, JAC Liner owner, of alleged union busting, illegal dismissal, illegal deductions and other unfair labor practices.

The JAC Liner management, however, said it would be better to leave the settlement of the issue to the Department of Labor and Employment.

At least 15 JAC Liner buses were inside the compound.

Supillio said the union would again start to barricade the Quezon City bus terminal. The strikers were violently dispersed by the police last month.

"We appeal to the riding public to support us in our struggle by temporarily not patronizing the bus company," he said.

The workers said more are expected to join the strikes as most of them just excused themselves to celebrate the Christmas with their families. *Delfin T. Mallari Jr., PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

THE YEAR THAT WAS

ERIC ARAZAS

Workers in a firecracker factory in Bocaue, Bulacan rush the making of various fireworks and pyrotechnics in time for the New Year celebration. The scene would be repeated about 12 months from now, when firecracker manufacturers hire contract workers to cope with demand.

Rizal cult heads tell Gloria to make good vow not to run

By Tonette Orejas
PDI Central Luzon Desk

ARAYAT, Pampanga—Of the 14 Philippine Presidents, it must have been President Macapagal-Arroyo who has best honored Dr. Jose Rizal, according to a leader of a cult here that regards the country's national hero as a god.

"Nagbigay-pugay kay *Amang Infinito*, para bang veneration (He honored the Infinite Father (Rizal), it seemed like a form of veneration)," Esting Malang said in praise of the President's choice of the occasion, the 106th death anniversary of Rizal, in announcing her decision not to seek a second in 2004.

Malang, 70, leads the Senor Ignacio Coronado Jose Protacio Rizal Mahal na Ina Birheng Sinukwan Universal Shrine in Barangay San Juan Bano here. The one-hectare shrine, ringed by tall bamboo poles, stands on the foothills of Mt. Arayat.

But in making that promise before Rizal, Malang stressed Ms Macapagal should "be sincere" and she "better fulfill it."

"Or else, no one will believe her. She will discredit *Amang Infinito*. So she better make true her promise," he said.

If she did so, he said Rizal would gain the respect he so deserves. Rizal, he added, would also earn the respect and trust of those who would succeed Ms Macapagal as chief executive.

Malang said the President chose a perfect occasion because Rizal's teachings centered on moral reforms.

"*Paggalang sa bawat isa, pagkakapatiran, pagtutulungan, yun ang turo ni Amang Infinito*," he explained.

He said these teachings came from Rizal's novels *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, the novels that helped spark the Philippine Revolution.

In her speech, Ms Macapagal said Rizal's martyrdom led to the creation of the Philippine Republic in 1898.

Rizal was executed on Dec. 30, 1896 in Bagumbayan, now Luneta or Rizal Park in Manila.

"As we honor Jose Rizal today, it is fitting that I ask each Filipino to also make a sacrifice for our country," she said.

"Following the example of Jose Rizal, let us think of country and not just of self," she said.

Malang admired Ms Macapagal for drawing lessons from Rizal's life and sacrifice.

Other presidents, he noted, had not given Rizal this high esteem.

On the eve of the 104th death anniversary of Rizal two years ago, Malang criticized Ms Macapagal's predecessor, jailed former President Joseph Estrada.

"This Jose did not live Jose Rizal's teachings," he said then.

"We hope that the Filipinos, as one of Rizal's teachings had advised, would learn from their mistakes and choose a good leader next time," Malang said.

He said Ms Macapagal, if she was really sincere and honest, could be a major medium in putting an end to the country's chaos.

CPP reminds companies to pay taxes to rebs, 'avoid inconveniences'

LUCENA CITY—Just like the routine operation of any revenue collection agency of the government during the first part of the year, the Communist Party of the Philippines has also reminded its tax collection base to promptly pay the imposed revolutionary levy "to avoid any inconveniences."

Gregorio "Ka Roger" Rosal, CPP spokesperson, asked the owners of companies operating in their "controlled areas" to voluntarily submit themselves to the local New People's Army units for their corresponding revolutionary tax assessments.

"Those who are not yet included in the collection list should make contact with the local NPA command in the area. This is to prevent any untoward incident to arise due to possible misunderstanding, to avoid any inconveniences on both parties," he said in a cellular phone interview yesterday.

"Inconveniences" could be efforts to sabotage the company operations with the destruction of its equipment by a group of communist partisans.

Rosal maintained that as a revolutionary organization, the CPP-NPA unit has the right to impose and collect revolutionary tax in their respective areas of operation.

The military reported that communist insurgents killed at least 30 civilians, destroyed an estimated P110 million ($2.1 million) worth of property and collected $58 million in the course of their extortion activities last year.

The military likewise disclosed that during the same period, at least P500 million ($9.43 million) worth of estimated damage to cellular phone relay stations nationwide were also caused by the NPA sabotage operations.

Rosal vehemently rejected the accusations that it was civilians who suffered most from the destruction by the NPA of several cellular phone relay stations nationwide.

"Those lies are being peddled by the military to amplify the NPA punitive actions on those firms," he said.

"How can we create serious damage to the citizens when it will only take several days for any relay stations to resume operation?" Rosal asked.

He said the main intention of any NPA action against any telecommunication firm, "was only to bring the message that we're serious in our demand for their payment of the corresponding revo tax."

However, Rosal took exemptions to relay stations, which are being guarded by the military. "That's another matter. We have to deal with it in the most appropriate manner," he said without elaborating.

The NPA is the 9,000-strong armed wing of the CPP, which has been declared a terrorist organization by the United States and several European Union governments. *Delfin T. Mallari Jr., PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

Boy, 2, killed, parents hurt in grenade attack

GENERAL SANTOS CITY—A two-year-old boy was killed while his parents were injured when an unidentified man lobbed a grenade at their residential compound in a suburban village here on Tuesday dawn.

Police identified the boy as Jeremy Baja, youngest son of Jimmy and Loreta, both 40, who were confined in a hospital here due to shrapnel wounds they suffered from the explosion.

The family arrived here from Cebu City early Monday night to attend a family reunion. They stayed in the house of Jimmy's parents, Nating and Ciano Baja, in Barangay Apopong here, where the reunion would be held.

The boy went out of the house to answer the call of nature when the unidentified suspect tossed the grenade inside the Baja compound.

The explosive shattered the boy's body while wounding his parents who were just a few meters behind him.

Members of the Explosive Ordinance Disposal team recovered from the vicinity of the blast area the safety lever of a Belgian-made M72 fragmentation grenade.

Bomb experts told reporters here that the same type of bomb was used in a November 14 grenade attack inside the compound of a house rented by a Bureau of Internal Revenue official here.

The BIR official, investigators said, could also have been the target of a vengeance.

The police said they are studying personal grudge as the possible motive behind the latest grenade throwing.

A neighbor, who asked not to be named, told investigators that at around 6 p.m. Monday, an unidentified man on board a motorcycle arrived in the area looking for Baja's compound.

The man was seen heading toward the Baja compound after getting the information he wanted. *Aquiles Z. Zonio, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

5 men rob Taiwanese fish firm at height of New Year

By Nestor P. Burgos Jr.
PDI Visayas Bureau

ILOILO CITY—Five suspects robbed a Taiwanese-owned fish exporting company at midnight yesterday at the height of New Year's Day revelries in San Dionisio town, 112 kms north of here.

The suspects armed with M-16 rifles and shotguns barged into the compound of the Fungjwan Trading Company in Sitio Gamot, Barangay Tiayabas in San Dionisio and immediately disarmed the lone security guard, Mamerto Cordero, according to reports reaching the Iloilo Provincial Police Office (IPPO).

The suspects then roused the company owner Tsung Liang Tsai and his Filipino wife Rogelyn Medallo and took P200,000 in cash and pieces of jewelry estimated to cost P80,000.

The suspects took hostage Medallo and fled on board the company-owned L-300 van toward Sitio Villa Rose in Barangay Tubli, around five kilometers from the compound. They later transferred to three motorcycles and fled toward an unknown destination leaving their hostages unharmed.

Four of the suspects were arrested six hours later in Barangay Arante, Sara town, 102 kms north of here, according to Senior Supt. Juan Mabugat, IPPO director.

They were identified as Jex Asiwagan, 24; Vanny Balili, 35; Johnny Delanda, 19; and Eddie Floredelliza, 38. The suspects, all fish vendors, were identified by the couple as the robbers.

GMA visits help Baguio boost tourism

By Vincent Cabreza
PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

LA TRINIDAD, Benguet—It's official. President Macapagal-Arroyo's annual vacations in Baguio City have been drawing tourists, Department of Tourism officials said here on Sunday.

Based on hotel bookings, the sudden downtown traffic jams, queues at local restaurants and sales of souvenir items and vegetables, Baguio's tourism season is alive "whenever the President spends her holidays in Baguio," Purificacion Molintas, DOT Cordillera director, said.

The President and her family arrived here on Dec. 26 and spent New Year's Eve here.

On Sunday, Ms Macapagal, First Gentleman Jose Miguel Arroyo, their children Luli and Dato, some friends and relatives joined Metro Manila visitors in picking fresh fruits from this town's strawberry fields.

Most tourists were both delighted and surprised with the President's presence.

On Monday, Ms Macapagal visited Burnham Park, which is swamped with out-of-town visitors, for the Rizal Day rites.

Molintas said the "fantastic visitor turnout" might mean the city had surpassed the tourism picture of the last two years.

In 2000, this mountain resort city hosted 350,230 tourists. At least 11,613 of them were foreigners.

Last year, the DOT saw a slight dip of about 10 percent in tourist arrivals. "But this year, we see more than the tourist arrivals of December 2001, so maybe we can surpass the figure again," Molintas said.

"We were booked solid last night, and our restaurant is full, and I realized it happens whenever (Ms Macapagal) is here. I didn't even know she was here. But when I did, I knew business is going to be good," said Janine Chan, owner of the Mountain Lodge and president of the Baguio Association of Hotels and Inns (Bahai).

"The tourists are mostly domestic... locals. I haven't seen any foreign tourists yet. But this is really good," she said.

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INQUIRER Southern Luzon
Editor Jun Bandayrel ◎ Bureau Chief Floreño G. Solmirano

Southern Luzon, a theater of war

YEARENDER

SOUTHERN Luzon continues to be the main theater of the war between the mainstream New People's Army and the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

The Southern Luzon Unified Command based in Camp Nakar, Lucena City reported that government soldiers engaged the communist rebels in at least 84 encounters in 2002. It also reported the recovery of least 205 firearms, including two machine guns, from the NPA during the period.

The Solcom also accused the NPA of 75 murders in Southern Tagalog in the same year.

Armed Forces Chief of Staff Gen. Dionisio Santiago admitted that nothing has changed and the insurgents remained strong in Southern Luzon—Bicol, Mindoro and Quezon—based on the origins of the rebels' firearms that were recovered by soldiers.

There were no available data from the communist insurgents to match the government's statistics.

NPA attacks

The NPAs, despite military claims that the communist guerrilla group was becoming a spent force, launched more attacks last year.

When the Communist Party of the Philippines ordered the NPA to target power and telecommunications facilities to inflict "calculated damage," guerrillas started a series of attacks on relay stations of telecommunications firms in Bicol and Mindoro, Laguna, Quezon and Batangas, damaging millions of pesos worth of equipment.

The NPA also attacked the Lopez police station, leaving behind the town's chief of police and one officer dead. About a week after, the guerrillas raided a military detachment just outside San Narciso town in the Bondoc Peninsula area, killing a soldier and wounding four others.

The island of Mindoro served as the main stage of the armed conflict followed by Quezon, Laguna and Batangas.

Last month, a group of NPA hit men in Mindoro Oriental killed four soldiers and wounded seven others, including the Army's top official in the province.

The attacks came after the US and the European Union placed the CPP-NPA in their lists of foreign terrorist organizations in early August.

As year 2002 concluded and amid the government's posturing of renewed interest in peace talks, Gregorio "Ka Roger" Rosal, CPP spokesperson based in Southern Luzon, declared that communist rebels scattered in at least 128 guerilla fronts across the country will launch "bigger, frequent and bigger tactical offensives" against government forces in 2003.

But it was the innocent civilian that always felt the brunt of the hostilities.

Karapatan-Southern Tagalog, a human rights watchdog, said the government's counter-insurgency operations were responsible for widespread human rights violations.

Eden Marcellana, Karapatan-ST secretary general, reported that last year, government forces allegedly committed at least 967 cases of human rights violations, victimizing at least 1,558 families and 2,893 individuals.

Refugees

The heavy concentration of military forces in the countryside also sent hundreds of people fleeing their homes in the Southern Tagalog Region.

Numbering close to 300, and mostly composed of children from Mindoro Island and now living in makeshift abodes in the sanctuary of a school compound in Cavite, the refugees have a lot of stories to tell.

Some of them have already spent their second Christmas in different refugee centers in Manila, Quezon and Laguna. And with the expected surge of military operations after the holidays, the feeling of fear, anxiety and self-pity grips the refugees.

Most of the internal refugees, according to human rights advocates, now want to go home. But not with soldiers still around.

Maj. Gen. Roy Kyamko, the top Solcom official who managed the day-to-day operation of government forces in Bicol and Southern Tagalog regions, accused the militant groups of waging a propaganda war when it pointed to the AFP and the PNP as human rights violators.

Kyamco said the people should know better.

The communists, however, seem to have an edge in the propaganda war. Rosal recently held a clandestine press conference, displaying the guerrillas' skill at propaganda.

Tourism

Down in Palawan, the year of the horse was a mix of triumphs and failures among Palawenos while the capital Puerto Princesa City was embroiled in political crisis.

The tourism industry, which was on the verge of collapse brought by the May 2001 Abu Sayyaf kidnapping, managed to leap a little higher in 2002.

Dos Palmas Resort bounced back on March 8 after its temporary closure due to a decline in tourist arrivals. It now continues to cater to local and foreign clienteles—mostly Asians.

Hotel owners and managers say their bookings have improved compared to the past year. The city tourism office said tourist arrivals have increased, especially in December and partly because of the Philippine National Youth Games-Batang Pinoy Championships.

The national sports competition, proven to be an incomparable promotional tool, did not only bring children athletes but has also created a tourism trend in the province.

The early part of year 2002 became an extension of the May 11, 2001 elections. Officials of the 66 barangays of the city in January moved to recall the then newly-elected mayor Dennis Socrates. The rest was history. The Supreme Court made a landmark decision on Nov. 12, recalled Socrates and installed three-term mayor Edward Hagedorn.

Palawan's environment has been in constant battle with threats.

Despite previous apprehensions, on Jan. 31, a group of 95 Chinese fishermen on board four fishing vessels were caught in the Tubbataha Reef National Marine Park, one of the heritage sites of the country and haven to more than 100 species.

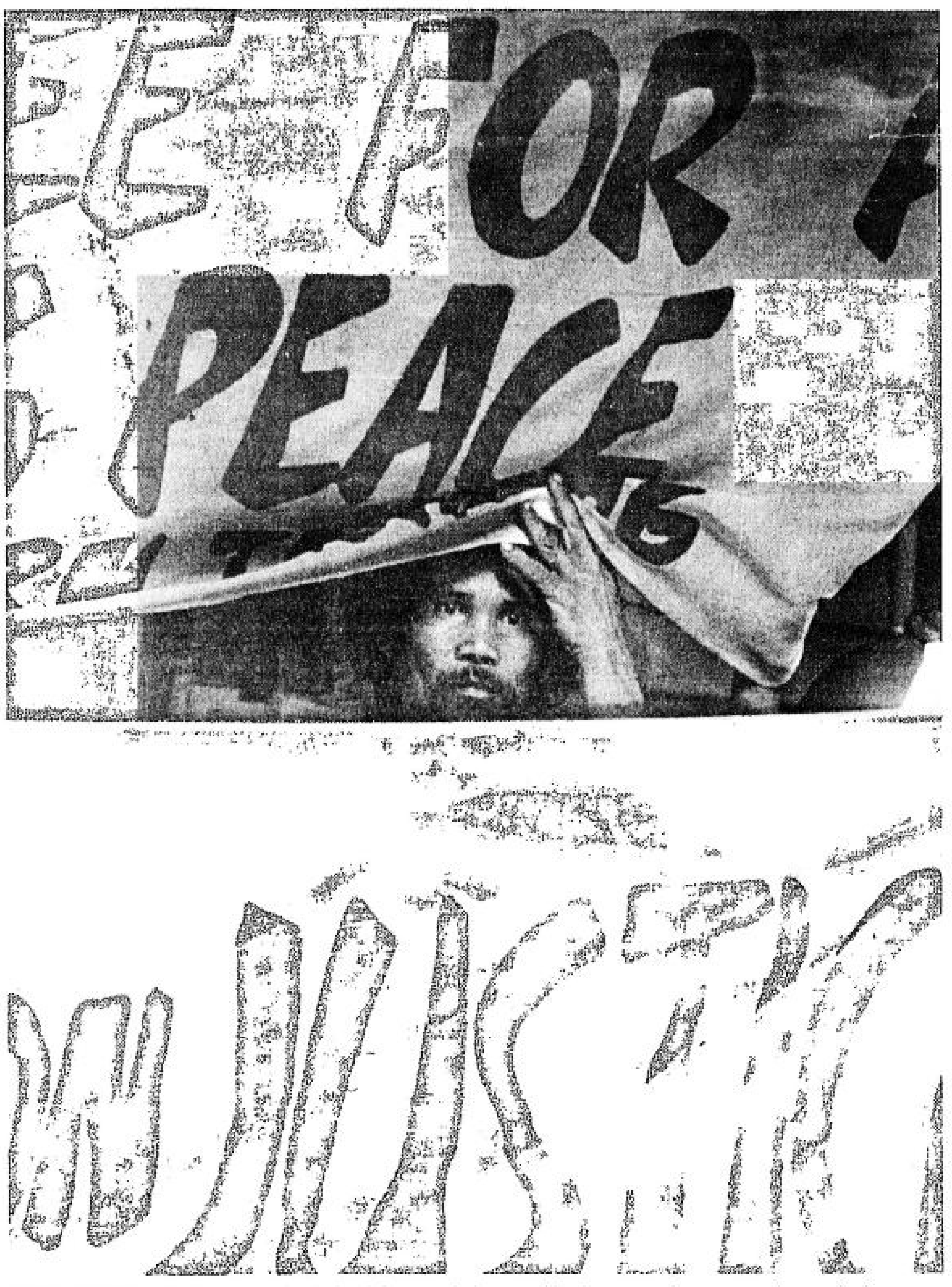
> 'But it was the innocent civilian that always felt the brunt of the hostilities.'

A week after that, 21 more poachers were arrested in the southern island municipality of Balabac. In May, another batch of 20 were caught in Tubbataha. On Sept. 12, 38 Chinese were again apprehended near the Camago-Malampaya Natural Gas Project.

In the words of Palawan Rep. Abraham Mitra, the Chinese are insulting Filipinos "because of their wanton disregard of our laws and disrespect of our environment."

Despite the apprehensions, Mitra doubted prosecution. He said the intervention of the Department of Foreign Affairs has helped save the Chinese poachers.

He expressed pity toward local law enforcers and NGO members as they risk their lives and limbs and sail on high seas amid bad weather just to implement the laws.



THE BATTLE for the hearts and minds of the people is waged in slogans and propaganda, words that represent the face of a guerrilla like this man peering through streamers. EDWIN BACASMAS

Diplomacy

Palawan officials and residents did not take sitting down the soft stance of the national government against the Chinese fishers. The Palawan Council for Sustainable Development refused to drop the criminal charges against the poachers despite the concurrence of the National Committee on Illegal Entrants to release the Chinese on diplomatic relations.

On Sept. 27, residents trekked the streets to stop continued attacks on the environment. Armed with placards and streamers, students, government officials, church leaders, fisher folk, NGOs, and indigenous peoples trooped to the regional trial court to express their dismay over the plea bargaining agreement entered into by the national government.

The 122 Chinese poachers were eventually released on Oct. 4.

On March 23, the Pala'wan tribes marched from the mountains to oppose a multimillion-dollar nickel refinery project in Bataraza, Palawan because of the possible destruction of the environment and their ancestral domain.

The battle has not been won. Four months after, then environment secretary Heherson Alvarez signed and approved the environmental compliance certificate of Rio Tuba Nickel Mining Corp. to signal a 20-year nickel-processing project.

On the other side of Palawan, foreigners are treated very well like brothers and sisters in a home called the Vietnamese Village in Puerto Princesa City.

Longing to seek recognition under Philippine laws, the remaining Vietnamese nationals made a big attempt on Oct. 10 to convince the House of Representatives' committee on justice that the Philippines is the place where they truly belong.

Che Nat Giao, 37-year-old chair of the Vietnamese Village here, believes that the passage of the bill seeking to grant permanent residency status to Vietnamese has long been overdue.

He said the passage of the bill embodies their deepest aspiration to end their long search for a just, humane and durable solution for them to move on with their lives.

Speaking in fluent English, Che said it was only the Filipino who embraced, loved and never betrayed them.

Another issue marred by unending debate is the proposed memorandum of agreement (MOA) between the provincial and national governments over revenue in gas production.

President Macapagal-Arroyo's administration believes that the location of the natural gas platform is outside the territorial jurisdiction of the province. Hence, the province has no legal share in profits.

Local officials contend that it has become a custom for Palawan to benefit from whatever natural resource is found in its area but opted not to challenge the central government but instead settle for the best bargain—the MOA.

It's a long road for Palawan. The toughest fight has been fought and its environment has endured much.

Rice industry

In the Bicol Region, the hope brought about by several visits and promises of President Macapagal-Arroyo in the region have been overshadowed by restive farmers, scandals and insurgency-related events in 2002.

The farmers-dominated province of Camarines Sur, which is the biggest and most populous in Bicol, has been in the forefront against allowing rice imports.

With the National Confederation of Irrigators Associations (NCIA) working against unrestricted rice importation, the farmers scored the government for killing the local rice industry.

The NCIA said rice importation depressed the prices of palay to P5.50 when imported rice flooded the market during harvest season.

It added that unrestricted rice importation has also strengthened cartel dominance over the local rice industry with its consequent control on the imported rice.

Several scandals have surfaced that made sensation in the year 2002.

In October, former education secretary Raul S. Roco resigned from his office when a graft case filed against him was leaked to media.

Roco was also accused of favoring the University of Sto. Tomas Hospital by a province mate, former Undersecretary Jaime Jacob of the education department.

Political bickering among the members of the Camarines Sur provincial board continued and ended this year when Vice Governor Imelda Papin filed a sexual harassment complaint against a board member early in December.

In Catanduanes, provincial board officials launched a recall election against Gov. Leandro Verceles Jr. for alleged wrongdoings and manipulation of government funds.

A later attempt by President Macapagal-Arroyo, who came to Virac, to reconcile feuding political leaders in the province failed to produce positive results.

The scant showing of the *butanding* (whale sharks) in the waters of the Sorsogon in the early part of January and the frequent clashes between the NPA and government forces somehow failed to whet the appetite of both local and foreign tourists to come to Bicol.

On the ecological side, illegal fishing and poaching off the coasts of the Burias Pass remained largely unchecked, culminating in the catching and slaughter in February of at least two mature whale sharks in Burias town in Masbate.

In March, health officials in Legazpi City raised the alarm against AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases following a marked increase in the number of cases in the area.

For the first time, regional health officials publicly admitted that there have been confirmed HIV positive cases in Camarines Sur and Albay provinces. ***Delfin T. Mallari Jr., Juan Escandor, Rollie Embile and Jofelle P. Tesorio, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau***

POWER from the barrel of the gun. JOAN BONDOC

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Ex-champ has meningitis

SYDNEY, Australia--Former British Open and U.S. Masters golf runner-up Jack Newton is recovering in an Australian hospital after suffering from a serious form of meningitis, doctors said Wednesday. Newton, 52, is expected to be released from a Newcastle hospital north of Sydney within five days after falling ill with meningococcal meningitis. *AP*

Purdue, Boise down rivals

EL PASO, Texas--The Purdue Boilermakers (7-6) overcame a 17-0 first-quarter deficit to beat the Washington Huskies (7-6) 34-24 in college football's Sun Bowl on Tuesday. In rainy Boise, Idaho, Brock Forsey led the heavily-favored Boise State Broncos (12-1) to a 34-16 defeat of the Iowa State Cyclones (7-7) in the Humanitarian Bowl. *Reuters*

NBA ROUNDUP

Pacers keep best mark in East; Wizards win

NEW ORLEANS, Louisiana--Reggie Miller scored 21 points, 17 of them in the second half, as the Indiana Pacers edged the New Orleans Hornets 89-86 in the NBA on Tuesday.

Brad Miller added 20 points and 10 rebounds for the Pacers, who rallied after trailing by 10 points at the half to hand the Hornets its third straight loss at home after starting the season with 11 consecutive home victories.

Indiana (23-8) has won four straight games and has the best winning percentage in the Eastern Conference.

New Orleans (18-15) has lost five in a row overall.

Jermaine O'Neal added 14 points for Indiana, while Ron Artest and Austin Croshere added 11 each.

Jamal Mashburn had 24 points for New Orleans, while Jamaal Magloire had 15 points and 10 rebounds. Elden Campbell added 14 off the bench.

The Hornets were without guard Baron Davis, who left the game early in the first quarter with back spasms.

Wizards 105, Spurs 103

In Washington, Jerry Stackhouse scored 25 points to lead the Wizards to a 105-103 win over the San Antonio Spurs.

Larry Hughes scored 22 points for the Wizards (14-17), while Michael Jordan added 17.

Tim Duncan had 35 points, 13 rebounds and five blocks for the Spurs. David Robinson had 17 points and 10 rebounds, but San Antonio still lost its second straight game.

Celts 96, Grizzlies 89

In Boston, Antoine Walker tied a season-high with 33 points as the Celtics downed the Memphis Grizzlies 96-89.

Walker added 11 rebounds as he battled the flu to help the Celtics end a three-game losing streak.

Walter McCarty added 16 points off the bench for Boston, while Paul Pierce had 15.

Pau Gasol had 18 points, Gordan Giricek added 17 points and Lorenzen Wright scored 15 and had 12 rebounds for Memphis, which has lost 13 of its 14 road games.

Bulls 102, Blazers 87

In Chicago, Jalen Rose scored 32 points to help the Bulls end Portland's eight-game winning streak with a 102-87 victory.

Tyson Chandler had 27 points and 18 rebounds for the Bulls, which ended a three-game losing streak.

Scottie Pippen had 15 points for Portland while Bonzi Wells and Rasheed Wallace added 14 points each for the Trail Blazers.

76ers 83, Clippers 75

In Los Angeles, Allen Iverson had 27 points and Keith Van Horn added 19 points and 13 rebounds as the Philadelphia 76ers defeated the Clippers 83-75.

Eric Snow added 11 points for Philadelphia, which snapped a three-game losing streak.

Elton Brand had 21 points and 13 rebounds, Andre Miller added 15 points while Michael Olowokandi had 13 points and 12 rebounds for the Clippers.

Rockets 103, Bucks 80

In Houston, Steve Francis had 26 points and nine assists to lead the Rockets past the Milwaukee Bucks 103-80.

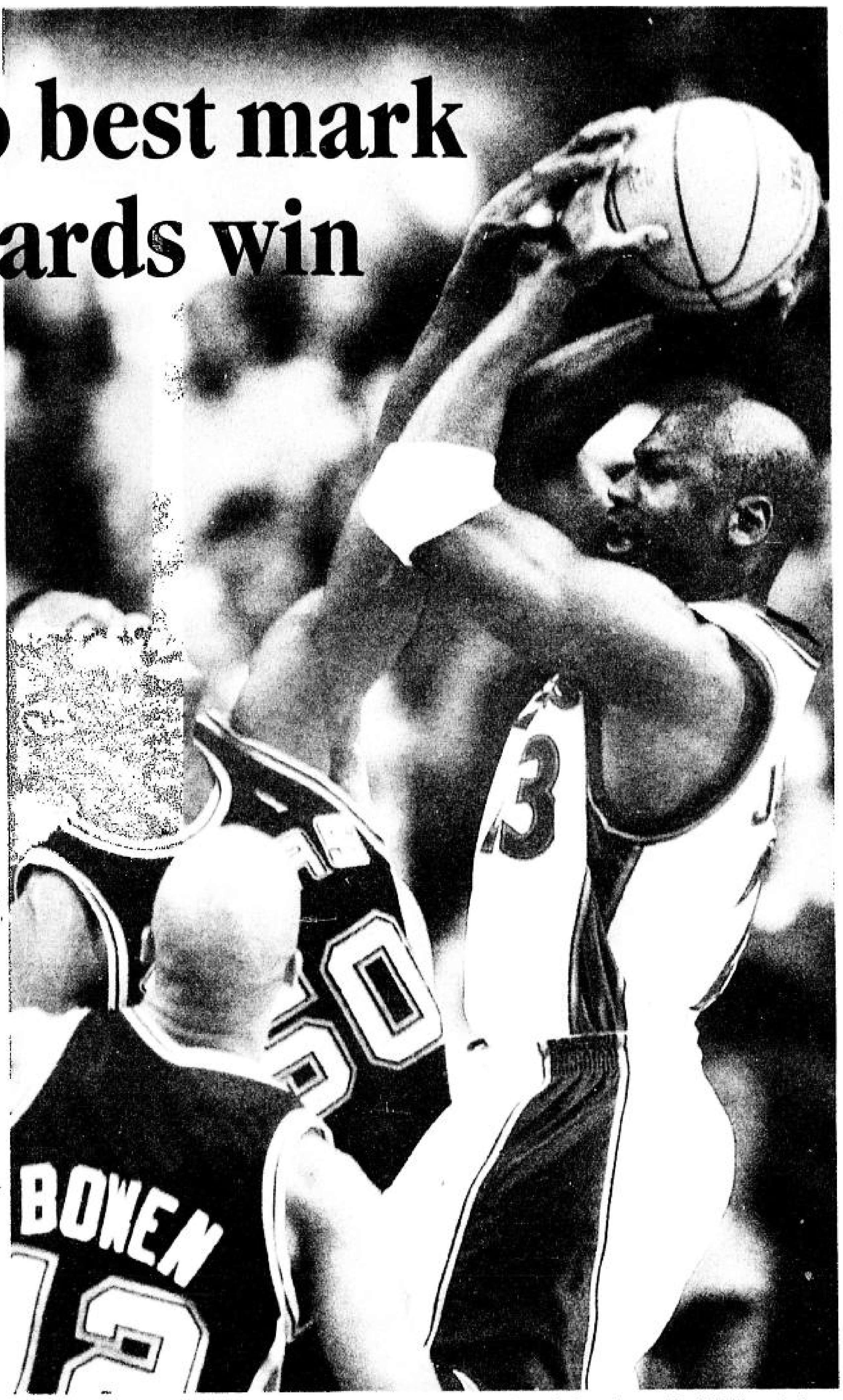
Cuttino Mobley added 21 points for the Rockets (17-13), while Yao Ming had 16 points and eight rebounds.

Sam Cassell had 22 points for the Bucks, while Tim Thomas added 13 points and Jason Caffery had 12.

Meanwhile, New York Knicks forward Clarence Weatherspoon and San Antonio Spurs forward-center Kevin Willis on Tuesday were handed one-game suspensions by the NBA for fighting in Monday's contest. *Reuters*

COMPLETE RESULTS

Boston 96, Memphis 89; Chicago 102, Portland 87; Indiana 89, New Orleans 86; Washington 105, San Antonio 103; Philadelphia 83, LA Clippers 75; Houston 103, Milwaukee 80. AFP



WASHINGTON Wizards' guard Michael Jordan (right) is fouled by San Antonio Spurs' center David Robinson in the second quarter. The Wizards prevailed, 105-103. AFP

Cop rules chess

POLICEMAN Esmael Abas downed Bobby dela Paz in 60 moves of a King's Indian Defense Monday in the seventh and final round to rule the December edition of the Metropolitan Chess Club non-master 2002 below category active chess tournament held at the J&F Divino Bldg. located along Quirino District in Quezon City.

Abas, a member of PNP Recom 9, finished with a final tally of 6.5 points, with six wins and one draw after seven rounds of play to bag his second MCC title for this year. Abas won P4,000.

In solo second with six points was Bacolod bet Nelson Villanueva who prevailed over Pitero Paterno of Tayuman, Manila in 45 moves of a Caro-Kann. Villanueva got P2,000.

RACING TIPS

AT SAN LAZARO
BY MR. 999

Race 1--1. Hummingbird 2. Silver Angel 3. Heza Gunner 4. Absurd
Race 2--1. Jackpot 2. Sky Wind 3. Great Hill
Race 3--1. Top Mark 2. D Greatest 3. Living Legend 4. Best Gift 5. Strong Element
Race 4--1. Bulakeña/Siete de Marso 2. West Bound 3. Parola Sunrise 4. Green Buck
Race 5--1. Real Gem 2. Bull Strike 3. Empowered 4. Adrenalin 5. Choice for Change
Race 6--1. Clipperzone 2. Sandstorm 3. Saint Michael
Race 7--1. Notable 2. Playing With Fire/Schwarzenegger 3. Naughty
Race 8--1. Golden Ballet 2. Fast Eddie 3. Sunny Puddles 4. Gemstone 5. Power Pack 6. Dancer's Bid
Race 9--1. Traktora 2. Big Mama 3. Ichiro 4. Samahan 5. Counter Strike
Race 10--1. Diamond Buck 2. Earth Angel 3. Party Princess 4. Rainbow Dazzler 5. Busanda Strike 6. Global Power

Samsung Putting Challenge resumes at Orchard

SLOTS to the much-awaited grand finals where a prize package worth no less than P75,000 will be at stake at the resumption of the Samsung Putting Challenge this weekend (Jan. 4-5) at the Orchard Golf and Country Club in Dasmariñas, Cavite.

Coming on the heels of the biggest leg so far of the Samsung putting series at Villamor, the Orchard leg is expected to draw a big number of members and guests to the club's practice green where a makeshift 9-hole course will test their putting skills.

There will competitions for both sexes and various ages with the division winners set to join qualifiers from six other legs in next month's grand finals at Wack Wack where the overall will win a Samsung digital television and a DVD home theatre system plus a T100 colored cellular phone also known as the True I.

Leg winners likewise get handsome prizes courtesy of Samsung and the co-sponsors of the series, TaylorMade adidas, Gatorade, Maxfli, Custom Clubmakers and Hotshots Flame-Grilled Burgers. Wave 89.1, City Lite 88.3, 103.5 K-Lite, Magic 89.9, KillerBee and 99.5 RT are radio partners.

The unique Putting Challenge is an open public competition during weekends. It goes side by side with the Samsung Amateur Tour which is a series of 36-hole tournaments with the next leg set to be held at Tagaytay Midlands on Jan. 9-10.

Among the first 40 qualifiers of the putting series in four different legs played at Aguinaldo, Canlubang, Riviera and Cebu are jungolf champs Dottie Ardina, Jayvie Agojo and national team mainstay Carmelette Villaroman.

Ardina and Agojo, who are both among those to be honored by the Philippine Sportswriters Association for their exploits abroad the past year, are both playing in the jungolf category while Villaroman is in the ladies division.

All three, however, will be eligible to vie for the overall title against those in the men's class and seniors group.

The top two men, and the winners in the ladies, seniors and jungolf categories per day will earn tickets to the grand finals.

Also on tap during the grand finals is the hole-in-one side-event which will award a brand new car to the winner. Only those who made aces on designated holes during the eliminations will be able to get a crack at the car.

After Orchard, only the Wack Wack leg remains to be completed before the first champion of the Samsung Putting series organized by the Professional Sports Management Group (PSMG) is known.

Here's to RJ, Mandarin's pride

SPECTATOR

Al S. Mendoza

THE NEW Year, just like Christmas, just ends. It's the thought that lingers, it's the meaning that lasts. While Christmas is the season of giving, the New Year is 12 months of living. You give to live, you live to give.

It was Nathaniel Hawthorne who said that generosity is the flower of justice. How true. You see injustice all year through, do your share by being generous all year through.

Goethe said, "Giving is the business of the rich."

I disagree. To me, giving is the business of everybody. A rich fella receiving a gift from a poor fella is the mother of generosity.

Listen to William Shakespeare: "Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind." We give to charity but what is giving when kindness is absent when dealing with our maid?

In the meantime, here's a continuation of my wish list for 2003.

- Ben Evardone holding a key position in the PBA Commissioner's Office. Ben's calculating mind backed up by a cool demeanor will help gun up the Eala Formula to sustain what Jun B had achieved in the nine years that he was the PBA helmsman.
- Ariel de Jesus seeing to fruition a great Toyota project that would revolutionize the scheme of things in the amateur basketball backyard. DJ's babe remains a big secret at the moment.
- Cito Dayrit acting out to the fullest his role as the president of all NSAs. If he will do a GMA–declaring also not to run for POC president next year-so much the better. Politicking will be drastically reduced.
- Col. Buddy [illegible] extending the hand of unity by [illegible] Jovy Mamawal to a key position at the Philippine Tennis Association after the Philta elections on Jan. 4. As a sure winner for the umpteenth time as Philta president, Buddy has nothing to lose but everything to gain. I believe Jovy will make a good Buddy ally.
- Eric Buhain reimbursing NSAs that had advanced expenses for tournaments abroad. That will enhance his image as a no-nonsense PSC chair all the more.
- Dioceldo "DS" Sy continuing to back Chino Trinidad's brand of leadership. Chair Chino's power as PBL chief virtually gets total support from DS. The two have become one, and one without the other would mean chaos for the PBL, still the country's No. 1 breeding ground for future PBA stars.
- Ramon "RJ" Jacinto sustaining his rock 'n' roll revolution by appearing regularly at 5-star hotels like Mandarin (every Friday night). RJ is a living symbol of what the Fifties-Sixties music is all about, and what music can do to soothe a nation in turmoil.
- Jojo Lastimosa succeeding in reorganizing the PBA Players Association. It's about time the players' voice is heard again. If Noli Eala is sincere in his earlier statement welcoming Jolas' move, it'd be nice to see Jolas sit in the PBA Board of Governors.
- Yours truly finally reviving his band that made a "little statement" in the good ole sixties. Caloy Rufo, our lead guitarist, is ready. The hardest to find is a keyboardist. Accepting applicants now.

4 derby champions join Mandaluyong tourney

FOUR international derby champions are competing in Mandaluyong Coliseum's grand opener for 2003, the Mandaluyong 9-Cock International Derby on Jan. 7, 9 and 11.

Sponsors are Sagupaan Super Feeds, Pagcor, Heritage Hotel and Washout Shampoo from Lakpue Drug Inc.

Confirmed to see action are hotelier Biboy Enriquez (Firebird), Jessie Viceo (San Rafael) Carlos Ortega of Baguio (C and J Farms) and Ucap president Raymond Velayo (Arnis Master II and Arnis Master AG Sur), who topped the Mandaluyong 9-Cock International Derby last June.

Velayo, who fielded the gamebirds of Rep. Ompong Plaza and former Congressman Peping Cojuangco, was double champion in the said event.

At stake in the derby being hosted by OPMI president Vic Yu is a guaranteed prize of P2 million. Entry fee is P35,000.

Ten entries will be fielded by the foreign participants. The latest to join are American breeders Jimmy Cody of Alabama and Howard Belk from California. Others are Chuck Berry of Oklahoma, Bobby Jonse of Texas, and Fil-Ams George Goitia, Rene Medina and partner Boy de Guzman of California.

Submission of weights is on Monday, Jan. 6, from 2 p.m. to 9 p.m. For inquiries on cockhouse reservations, please contact 531-4003, 531-4005, 535-2341 and 534-4110.

BLAST FROM THE PAST

TODAY in 1990, Ricky de Guzman notched 8-1/2 points to emerge overall champion of the DCV double open chess championship at the Doña Amparo Building in Manila.

Yao Ming-inspired song sweeps city of Houston

HOUSTON Rockets center Yao Ming of China pulls down a rebound in front of New Orleans Hornets center Jamaal Magloire in the first half of their NBA game Dec. 29, 2002 in Houston. AP

By Mark Babineck
AP Writer

HOUSTON—A song inspired by Yao Ming is sweeping the city. No wonder –it's simple, has a peppy beat and is easy to dunk to.

Houston Rockets fans have been singing the infectious chorus of "It's a Ming Thing" for weeks.

You can, too. Just chant "Yao Ming, Yao Ming-Yao Ming-Yao Ming, Yao Ming, Yao Ming" to the tune of the soccer-fan anthem "Ole, Ole, Ole."

The song was penned before the 2.29-meter (7-foot-6) Yao even signed a contract with the Rockets as the No. 1 pick in the draft. And it's getting into people's heads, especially now that the Chinese center is blossoming just two months into his NBA career.

"Subconsciously, I found myself singing it at home," Rockets coach Rudy Tomjanovich said. "I find myself wailing through the house, 'Yao Ming, Yao Ming-Yao Ming-Yao Ming.'"

The song was written by Chance McClain, a real estate appraiser, and Kevin Ryan, a graphic artist. They grew up together in the area and have churned out other tunes, usually lighthearted looks at the Houston sports scene. But "It's a Ming Thing" is their big number.

McClain wrote the song while driving on the highway after learning Rockets guard Steve Francis drew the lottery ball for the No. 1 pick in the 2002 draft, allowing the team to draft Yao.

The duo's songs have led to several local commercial jingles and a record deal, with the first CD due Jan. 7. It's called "Greatest Hit," a nod to the Yao-inspired song that's getting air play from Houston to Shanghai and points in between.

"We're kind of poking fun at ourselves with our title. We know most people will be buying the album for that song," Ryan said. "We have no idea all the places it's being played. It's just kind of gotten passed around the world."

The song originally was available for free on the Internet. But now that there's commercial demand, only a snippet can be downloaded legally.

The first verse of the 2-minute, 14-second song recalls the days when Hakeem Olajuwon led the Rockets to consecutive NBA titles in the 1990s:

"Without the Dream no one thought we'd survive,/ For too long we've been deprived./

Lyrics to the song "It's a Ming Thing," a tribute to Houston Rockets center Yao Ming, to the tune of the soccer-fan anthem "Ole, Ole, Ole:"

CHORUS:
Yao Ming, Yao Ming-Yao Ming-Yao Ming, Yao Ming, Yao Ming
Yao Ming, Yao Ming-Yao Ming-Yao Ming, Yao Ming, Yao Ming
Yao Ming, Yao Ming-Yao Ming-Yao Ming, Yao Ming, Yao Ming
Yao Ming, Yao Ming-Yao Ming-Yao Ming, Yao Ming, Yao Ming
Without the Dream no one thought we'd survive,
For too long we've been deprived.
The final piece of the puzzle has arrived,
The missing link of a championship drive.
CHORUS
Yao Ming bust on the scene with a bling-bling,
Dominating other teams, it's a Ming Thing.
Envisioning Houston's dream of a ring-ring,
Reinvigorating Clutch City, Yao Ming — Scream!

Longtime fans buy Celtics for $360M

By Jimmy Golen
AP Sports Writer

BOSTON—The storied Boston Celtics franchise on Tuesday passed into the hands of a group of longtime fans who pledged to bring a championship back to the city.

The agreement to buy the team for a league-record $360 million was announced on Sept. 27, and the NBA approved the deal late Monday. The Celtics announced the sale had been finalized Tuesday afternoon during Boston's 96-89 win over the Memphis Grizzlies.

The incoming owners take over from Paul Gaston, who succeeded his father, Donald, as owner in 1992.

The group of new owners is headed by venture capitalists Wyc Grousbeck and Stephen Pagliuca, both from the Boston area, and Grousbeck's father, H. Irving Grousbeck, founder of Continental Cablevision and now a Stanford Business School professor. On Dec. 12, the Abbey Group, a local real estate development firm, was added.

"I think the thing the whole group here likes about the team is this team plays really hard," Pagliuca said. "The coach has them just diving on balls. And that's what we're going to do as an ownership group. We're going to bond together and try to bring a championship back to Boston."

But the new owners said it was too soon to start talking about their imprint on the team.

"Today is a day for celebration, not a day for basketball operations," Wyc Grousbeck said. "We're going to roll up our sleeves quickly, maybe even tomorrow. I've got the keys to the office."

The price is the most paid for an NBA franchise, surpassing the previous high of $280 million paid for the Dallas Mavericks in 2000.

Stags domination, fierce rivalries mark 'NC' season

By June Navarro

ASIDE from the dominance of the multi-titled San Sebastian College Stags, the 78th NCAA basketball season was specially known for the fierce competition exhibited by the eight-member schools during the games.

So intense was the level of competition in every game, that several skirmishes, bench-clearing incidents and dastardly acts bordering on hooliganism had erupted among hot-tempered players and coaches.

No fines were assessed but a total of 12 players received suspensions for various offenses, some of them second-time offenders while a coach was heavily reprimanded for his disrespect on league officials.

The oldest collegiate league in the country also saw the banning of a Mapua playmaker who punched a player on one occasion and stormed the bench of their rival team on another instance.

For his unwanted acts, sophomore guard Jeffrey Martin was banned from seeing action for the Cardinals the rest of the season, so far an unprecedented event in collegiate basketball history.

During the second round of the College of St. Benilde-Mapua tussle, the Cardinals walked out for allegedly getting a raw deal from game officials while CSB coach Dong Vergeire took the microphone and blurted out words that somehow put league officials to shame.

Only in the NCAA.

YEARENDER

But the mother of all misdemeanors in the NCAA was the fight-marred San Beda College-Philippine Christian University encounter in the first round.

A shoving match between Red Lion Erl Merelos and Dolphin Aldwyn Ilagan triggered a bench-clearing incident that saw 23 players figuring in a melee on centercourt.

The fracas wiped out the entire fleet of the Dolphins except for slotman Bernzon Franco and Loreto Soriano, allowing the Lions to walk away with their first and only win of the season.

These incidents called the attention of the NCAA Management Committee to install preventive measures by imposing stiffer sanctions similar to what Martin got. The NCAA Mancom is also contemplating revising its by-laws to make it more attuned to the times.

On the brighter side, the NCAA, for the first time in history, got a far wider reach in terms of television exposure, definitely a boost to the players, teams and the league itself.

Studio 23 aired the NCAA games from the opening of the season up to the Finals where the Stags emerged as back-to-back champions.

The Stags swept the Blazers, 2-0, in the best-of-three championship series, giving the Recto-based dribblers their 11th NCAA men's basketball trophy that tied San Beda College at second.

San Sebastian coach Turing Valenzona hinted at another dynasty in the making, having steered the Stags to five straight championship titles in the '90s.

The Stags' title-clinching victory had somehow struck a balance between the deplorable events that happened in the league and the camaraderie that should be built within the NCAA family.

BOXING CLINIC
Former PSC Chair and Manila Mayor Mel Lopez (left) is shown with young aficionados during the Boxing Development Clinic recently in Tondo, Manila. More than 2,000 boys and girls have undergone boxing lessons under the clinic since May last year.

Kenyan runner shines

SAO PAULO, Brazil—Robert Cheruiyot of Kenya won the St. Silvester road race Tuesday, beating a field of more than 12,000 athletes from around the world to claim the 78th annual year-end event.

The 24-year-old Cheruiyot, who won this year's Milan Marathon, completed the 15-kilometer (9.3-mile) course through the wide avenues and narrow streets of South America's largest city in 44 minutes, 59 seconds for a top prize of 17,000 reals (about US$4,800).

Brazil's Marilson Gomes dos Santos was second in 45:06, followed by Kenya's Paul Kirui in 45:14. Ethiopia's Sileshi Sihen was fourth in 45:36 and Brazil's Alan Wendel Bonfim da Silva took fifth in 45:37.

Shortly after the start, Brazilians Lindomar Modesto de Oliveira and Wendel Divino Cruz moved out front and led the pack for about 4 kilometers. They quickly tired and were overtaken by Brazil's Leonardo Vieira Guedes, who led the race for the next few minutes.

Earlier, Marizete de Paula Rezende of Brazil bested a field of 2,500 athletes to win the women's division.

Rezende, 28, finished in 54:02 for a top prize of 17,000 reals (US$4,800). AP

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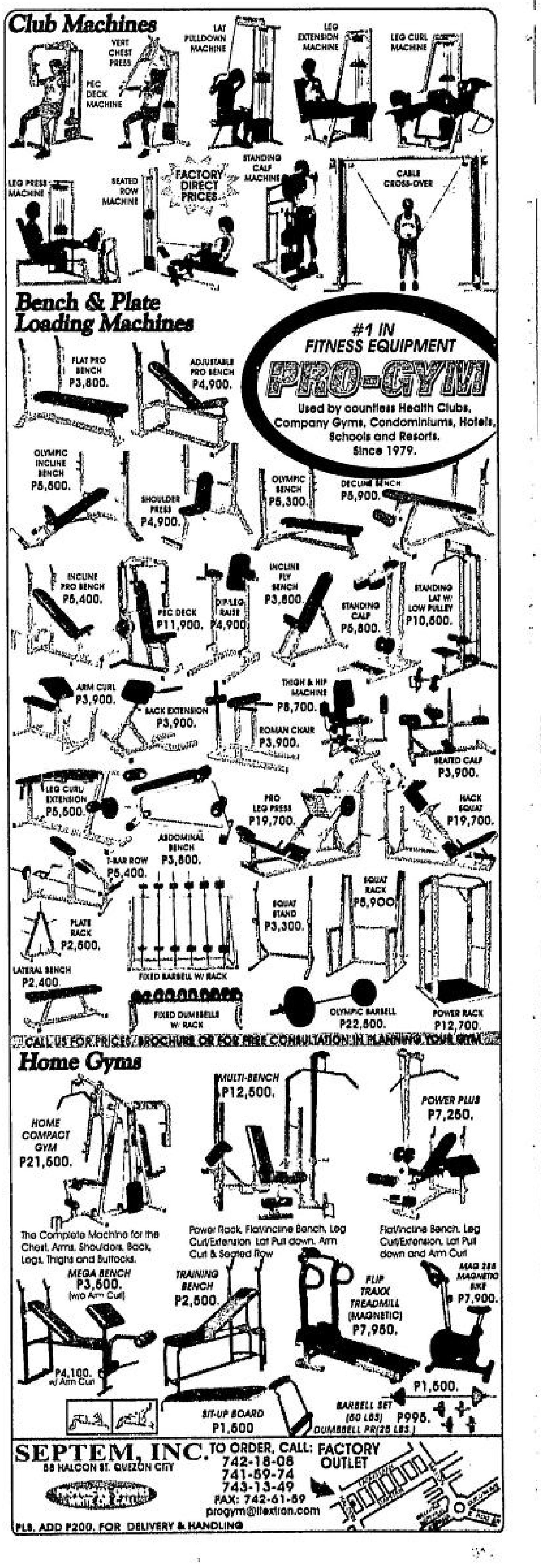
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Williams, Blake prevail as US dashes Spain's Hopman hopes

PERTH, Australia—The United States remained unbeaten at the Hopman Cup tennis tournament Wednesday with a 3-0 win over Spain after singles victories by Serena Williams and James Blake.

Williams opened the new year with a 6-3, 6-3 win over Virginia Ruano Pascual and Blake beat Tommy Robredo 6-3, 6-0. Williams and Blake then combined for a 6-1, 6-4 win in mixed doubles to end defending champion Spain's chances of making the finals.

The Americans play Belgium on Friday, with the winner likely to represent Group A in Saturday's final. The match will also see a replay of the WTA Championships final in which Kim Clijsters of Belgium beat Williams in Los Angeles.

That was Clijsters' first win over Williams in six attempts.

Williams said she was exhausted in Los Angeles after winning eight of 13 tournaments, including the French Open, Wimbledon and U.S. Open on the way to a 57-5 record in 2002.

Williams felt she was steadily warming up for the Australian Open starting Jan. 13 in Melbourne and didn't want to peak too soon.

Williams is striving to become the fifth woman to win four straight grand slams.

The Czech Republic played Italy later Wednesday.

BLAKE reacts after winning a point against Robredo.

In Adelaide, Australia, Franco Squillari of Argentina upset top-seeded Wayne Ferreira of South Africa 7-6 (4), 6-2 Wednesday at the AAPT Championships at Memorial Drive.

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In Madras, India, Asian tennis star Paradorn Srichaphan of Thailand and fit-again Mark Philippoussis of Australia made flying starts in the season-opening ATP Indian Open here on Tuesday.

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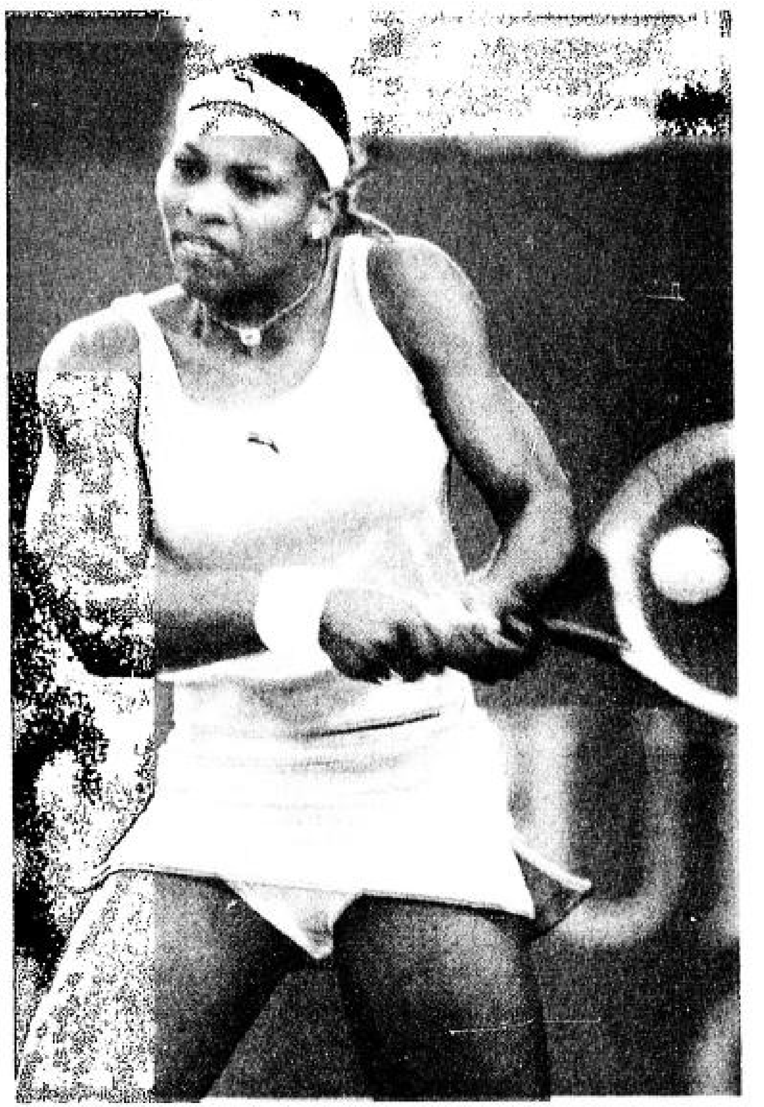
Meanwhile, top-seeded and defending champion Guillermo Canas of Argentina survived anxious moments against the big-serving Dick Norman of Belgium before winning 4-6, 6-2, 6-3. *AP, AFP*



WORLD women's number one Serena Williams of the US plays a backhand return during her match with Virginia Ruano Pascual of Spain. Williams won in straight sets 6-3, 6-3 . AFP

Mactan hosting nat'l triathlon trials Jan. 18

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To be held at the East Wing of the Tambuli Beach Club in Mactan Island, Cebu on Jan. 18, the annual national triathlon competition organized by the Cebu City Sports Commission and sanctioned by the TRAP will feature the junior sprint side event (750m swim-20 km run) aside from the elite male, elite female, club competition and the age-group race.

The event, sponsored by Speedo, Guardo Sports, Osaka Iridology, the cities of Cebu and Lapu-Lapu, RELIV Philippines, Philippine Sports Commission and the POC Sports For All Commission, will reward cash prizes for the top three winners of the elite (P7,000, P5,000 and P3,000), under-23 (P5,000, P3,000 and P2,000) and club competition (P7,000, P 5,000 and P3,000). The champion club will be sent abroad to participate in the Macau International Triathlon this coming August.

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METRO
E-mail: pr_metro@inquirer.com.ph
Editor Louie C. Camino

Lotto pot hits P100-M mark

MILLIONS of hopeful Filipinos will line up and try their luck for today's New Year lotto draw with the jackpot projected to break the P100-million mark. The jackpot prize for the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office's 6/49 Super Lotto is expected to reach P102 million, said Conrado Zabella, PSCO assistant general manager.

Agnes Donato

NO WAY to start the New Year, but this firefighter gives it his all to contain the blaze on Apacible Street, Manila—just one of 10 fires to hit the metropolis.

Unholy welcome

THERE was a significant decrease in the number of firecracker-related injuries (see page 1), but this bright trend was dampened by reports that 10 fires broke out and at least nine people were killed in violent incidents as Metro Manila residents welcomed Year 2003 yesterday.

Manila: 6 deaths, 4 fires

Six people died and at least two were injured by stray bullets during the New Year revelry in Manila.

At least 121 firecracker injuries were reported in various hospitals in the city.

Four fires also hit the city in the few hours before and after Dec. 31 midnight, according to the Western Police District's tactical operations center.

At the temporary housing site in Vitas, Tondo, Jerry Toledo, 32, was stabbed dead by a neighbor whom he tried to stop from lighting a firecracker inside their tenement around 10:30 p.m. on Tuesday.

Suspect Eddie Rubio, 27, was arrested by barangay authorities. He even tried to stab himself to make it appear that he was the victim.

Around 11:30 p.m. Tuesday, driver Mark Medina, 24, was shot dead by an unidentified man during a brawl that took place along Castillejos Street in Quiapo.

Medina, of 1040 Vergara St., Quiapo, was pronounced dead upon arrival at the Philippine General Hospital.

In Quiapo, out-of-school youth Roberto Aguilar was found with a fatal stab wound at the corner of Basan Street near the Quinta Market around 4:30 a.m. yesterday.

Investigator SPO2 Benito Cabatbat said the victim was last seen alive with a friend on their way to buy some cigarettes. Aguilar was declared dead upon arrival at the Jose Reyes Memorial Medical Center.

In Sampaloc, 35-year-old Jose Dioco was found dead from multiple stab wounds inside a large flower pot on A.H. Lacson Street.

The victim and his neighbors were having a drinking spree when a free-for-all erupted, according to SPO4 Ernesto Jose Jr.

On New Year's eve, a fire caused by a short-circuited electric fan caused a 10-minute fire in Malate.

No one was injured in the fire, which started at 7:33 p.m. in the house of one Danilo Dayao along Singalong Street, according to FO3 Wilson Tana.

Two fires hit residential areas in Malate shortly after midnight yesterday.

One fire struck a house on Pedro Gil corner Adriatico Street around 12:20 a.m. and another at Adriatico corner Remedios Street around 12:30 a.m.

Also in Malate, a fountain firework sparked an hour-long fire that hit another residence on 27 Leon Guinto St. at 12:30 a.m.

Nobody was injured in the fires. Damages to property were initially pegged at P100,000.

Around 9:30 a.m. yesterday, a fire hit the fourth floor of the PYF Building on Apacible corner L. Guinto Streets.

The fire started at the room of one Alicia Robles, who was out of the house. *Jerome Aning*

Pasay: 2 deaths, 2 fires

Two people were killed and five others were injured in a series of violent incidents that welcomed the new year in Pasay City.

Worse, two fires hit the city and gutted a garments factory in Leveriza and an apartment in Malibay. No one was reported injured in the incidents which were supposedly triggered by firecrackers.

Hernando Dueñas, 57, was walking with student Rodgie Lobrigo, 18, near the corner of Andrews Avenue and Domerta Road when five unidentified men blocked their path at around 3:30 a.m. The suspects spared the student but stabbed Dueñas to death.

About four hours earlier, a man repeatedly fired at 22-year-old Michael Dangatao while the victim was sitting in an alley in Barangay Sto. Niño. Dangatao suffered five gunshot wounds in the body and later died at the San Juan De Dios Hospital. *Christian Esguerra*

Quezon City: 1 dead, 1 fire

One person died while five others were injured by stray bullets during New Year celebrations in Quezon City.

Death claimed security guard Ismael Bulan, 42, of 22-B Ninada St., Litex Road, Barangay Commonwealth, Quezon City and a security guard of the SG Custodian Security Agency, in the New Year.

Bulan was standing in front of his house drinking coffee at around 5:30 a.m. when he was hit by a stray bullet on the left shoulder. Bulan was rushed to the Fairview General Hospital but was declared dead on arrival.

Meanwhile, a wayward firecracker rocket landed on the roof of a house in Parkway Village, Barangay San Antonio. This caused a fire which burned down the house. No one was reported injured. *Alcuin Papa*

East Metro: 1 fire, 27 injured

Twenty seven people were reported hurt during the New Year's celebration in eastern Metro Manila and nearby Rizal province.

Police authorities said there were fewer firecracker-related injuries in eastern Metro Manila this year compared to 2002 where at least 72 people were reported hurt.

Meanwhile, a fire of still undetermined origin broke out in Pasig City shortly after midnight yesterday.

SPO2 Rod Salamanca, Pasig City police station desk officer, said the 45-minute blaze, which started at about 12:45 a.m., gutted a six-door apartment along Pasig Boulevard, near the Pasig Rotunda. No one was reported hurt in the incident. *Nelson Flores*

Camanava: 2 fires, 60 injured

Some 60 persons were reported injured, including three who were hit by stray bullets, during the New Year's celebration in the Caloocan-Malabon-Navotas-Valenzuela (Camanava) area.

Meanwhile, at least P1 million worth of goods and properties went up in smoke when fire hit two separate business establishments early yesterday morning at the height of the New Year celebration in Valenzuela City.

As revelers were happily welcoming 2003, a blaze razed Ocean Furniture located on Camelia Street, Barangay Paso De Blas, around 1:20 a.m., according to initial reports from the local fire bureau.

Around 10 minutes after the first fire started, an electrical supply warehouse on Magiliw Street, Lena Subdivision, Barangay Dalandan, was also hit by fire, according to FO2 Marlon Aniasco, arson investigator.

The three-hour blaze started around 1:30 p.m. inside the warehouse and quickly spread and gutted the establishment filled with electrical supplies and equipment, fire investigators said.

The burned structure was said to be owned by a certain Mario Ang.

Tina Santos

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Militants stage last-ditch try to stop rate hike

By Agnes Donato

THE MILITANT Bagong Alyansang Makabayan yesterday dared President Macapagal-Arroyo to make good on her promise of reforms by stopping the implementation of a 17-peso water rate hike by the Manila Water Company Inc.

Bayan spokesperson Renato Reyes Jr. said that the water rate increase could be the first test of President Macapagal's sincerity.

"Metro Manila consumers who have long suffered under a regime of privatization and high water rates are eagerly awaiting what the President would do regarding this terrible news at the start of the new year," Reyes said. "This is a test case on what the public can expect from a non-electioneering president. Will the President reaffirm her love for the Ayalas or choose to save consumers?" he asked.

Starting yesterday, Manila Water's basic charges were increased by P4.25 per cubic meter.

This came after the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System approved the Ayala-owned Manila Water's request to raise water rates by P17, to be spread over five years.

"The increase is part of government's move to soften the impact of foreign exchange losses of the company's dollar-denominated loans," Reyes claimed. "Through the water rate hike, the government and Manila Water will make the public pay for P654.9 million in forex losses."

My advice on how to be sufficient

ON TARGET

Ramon Tulfo

THIS item is different from what I've been putting out in this space. It's going to create varied reactions from my readers. Some will agree with me, many others will disagree, still others will think I've gone crazy.

If you want to be happy and prosperous this year, share your blessings. Give away 10 percent of your monthly earnings to the poor and the underprivileged even if it hurts your pocketbook.

If you're rich, give away things and money you have in excess to the poor and needy. If you're not rich, allot part of your time to visit a sick friend or relative, console the grief-stricken, pray for those who have touched your life, whether they are your friend or enemy.

By the way, prayer is the best gift that you can give to your fellowmen.

* * *

The Universe will reward you for your generosity by giving back to you more than what you have parted with.

If it's not material things that will come back to you, it will be good health. Remember, health is wealth.

What you sow is what you reap.

* * *

People who tithe will tell you that they've not lacked for money since the time they started practicing it. You may not become filthy rich like Lucio Tan but you won't go scrounging around for cash when you need it.

What is tithing? It's an age-old practice of giving to your church or favorite charity 10 percent of what you earn.

The practice goes back to pre-biblical times. In primitive tribes, people burned their best harvest of crops or the best part of the animal they hunted for their deity in order to be rewarded with bountiful food in the next season or hunt.

* * *

I started tithing in 1985. I read in a book the reward one gets when he tithes.

I was incredulous at first but I tried tithing anyway. Since I don't go to church, I gave 10 percent of my earnings to young cancer patients at the Philippine General Hospital. I gave anonymously.

Since then I have never lacked for money.

Now, I am able to give much, much more than what I gave away in 1985. The other benefit is that I am a much happier person than I was before because I give joy to others. If you want joy, give joy to others.

* * *

There's a saying, the more you give, the more you will receive. That saying is true in the figurative, as well as in the literal, sense.

Whatever you give away that comes straight from your heart will come back to you seven fold.

Give till it hurts. The hurt will later turn into joy.

* * *

Why is it that people who are generous to the poor and needy never run out of things that they give away wholeheartedly?

It's not mumbo-jumbo or miracle. I don't believe in mumbo jumbo. Neither do I believe in miracles.

I practice tithing but I'm not a religious person. Yet, I've found out that what I give away comes back to me many times over.

* * *

When you give wholeheartedly, you make a statement to the Universe that you are sufficient.

The Universe responds by giving you back what you say you are sufficient of. Your act of giving away money, other material things or something as abstract as love is a statement that you have enough of what you give away.

That's why philanthropists are able to give away more year after year. Not all philanthropists are wealthy people. Many of them have average income who are just motivated by the desire to help others.

* * *

A woman friend whose husband is a very controversial guy practices tithing but is not aware that she's doing it.

Whenever I go on vacation to the Subic Bay complex, I pass by this woman's house in Pampanga. She always asks me to deliver sacks of rice and other foodstuff to the Aetas inside the Subic Bay complex.

***"Kawawa naman sila,* Mon. *Bigay mo sa kanila 'yan para naman makatulong,"* she always tells me.**

In times of calamity, this woman is the first to send donations to the victims. She does it from the goodness of her heart. She does her charitable work without fanfare.

I'm not surprised the woman is blessed with all the good things life has to offer. The Universe rewards her generosity.

GMA now has time to run after crooks, VACC says

By Jerome Aning

NOW THAT President Macapagal-Arroyo has announced that she will not run for public office, she will have more time to run after criminals, according to the the Volunteers Against Crime and Corruption.

Dante Jimenez, VACC founding chair, is hoping that there will be fewer criminal cases this year after the President announced her controversial decision during the Rizal Day rites in Baguio City.

"Since the President has announced she won't run in 2004, she will now have more time to run after crooks," Jimenez said.

He told the INQUIRER that the President will have a free hand implementing reform laws, such as the revamp of the Philippine National Police, without being accused of politicking.

"The bad eggs in the police ranks and the criminal syndicates would feel that she means business," he said.

The Manila-based anti-crime group also urged the government to make up its mind about the death penalty.

"This is the best time to enforce the death penalty, because (the President will) no longer be worried about the religious and human rights groups opposed to it," Jimenez said.

But if the President were to uphold the pro-life stand, Jimenez said, Congress should amend the death penalty law.

He said the VACC is amenable to the partial scrapping of capital punishment in less serious offenses such as those that fall in the "not-so-heinous" crimes against persons category.

Jimenez said death convicts are getting "technical commutations" because of delays in executions.

A convict whose death sentence was approved by the Supreme Court must be executed in a year, according to the death penalty law.

Jimenez said until the death penalty is abolished, the government must implement the law to the letter.

ERIK ARAZAS

SAME OLD NEW YEAR

A postdiluvian scenario awaits pedestrians on New Year's day, when the streets of Metro Manila are awash in trash, mostly remains of pyrotechnic materials lit up the night before.

2 cops caught firing guns on New Year

By Leila Salaverria

TWO LAWMEN were caught firing their guns while a security guard was hit in the head by a stray bullet on New Year's eve in Makati City.

PO3 Virgilio B. Bismonte, a police officer assigned to the Mandaluyong police, and Cesar Ledesma, who identified himself as a National Bureau of Investigation agent, are now being investigated for indiscriminately firing their guns, according to PO2 Joel Delos Santos of the Makati police.

Policemen arrested Bismonte after residents complained that he was firing his gun at around 10 p.m. on Tuesday on Don Pedro corner Alfonso Street in Barangay Poblacion.

Not long after, Ledesma was taken to police headquarters for firing his weapon on Diezel Street, Barangay Palanan.

Bismonte and Ledesma are now detained at the Makati Police headquarters.

At around 11:45 p.m., security guard Karl B. Patria, 31, was standing outside his home on Zero Street, Barangay West Rembo, and enjoying a fireworks display when, from out of nowhere, a bullet grazed his head.

He was taken to the Makati Medical Center for treatment.

SPO4 Leonardo Timtiman said Patria suffered only a surface wound and was declared out of danger.

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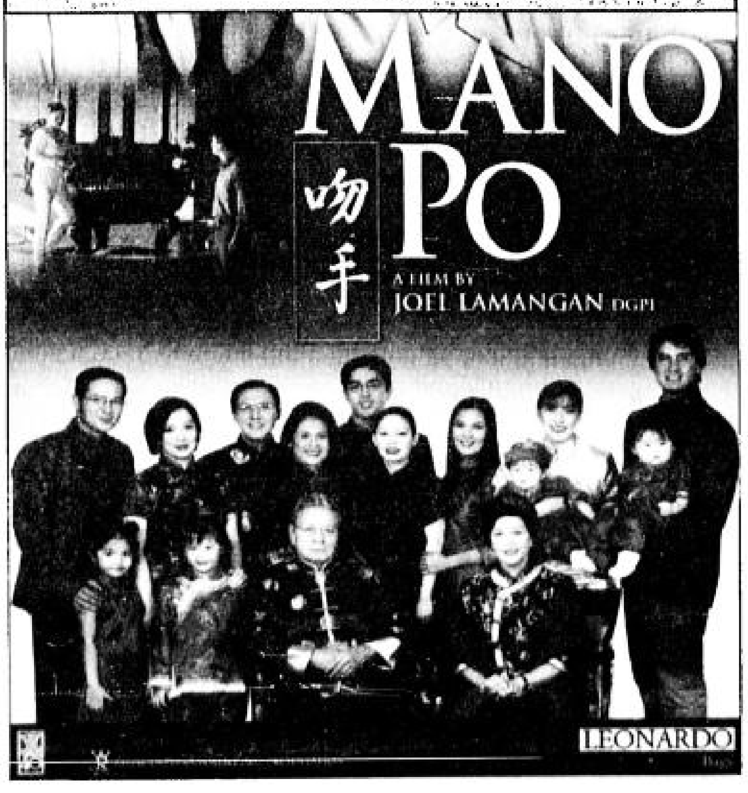

METROBRIEFS

Killed

NILO Caigoy, Carlos Tupas and Maximo Esperagoza, were killed in Pasig City and Antipolo over the weekend, according to police. Caigoy, 29, and Tupas, 41, both of Barangay Pinagbuhatan, Pasig City, were shot while they were sleeping by a still unidentified gunman who barged inside their respective homes late Sunday night, police said. Caigoy died on the spot after he was shot in the head with a .45-caliber pistol. Tupas died at the Pasig City General Hospital after he was shot in the chest with a 12-gauge shotgun, police said. Esperagoza, 48, of Golden Hills Subdivision, Barangay San Roque, Antipolo City, was on his way home when suspect Rodolfo Gallo, 25, approached the victim and stabbed him over an old grudge. Police said Esperagoza died at the Unciano General Hospital. *Nelson Flores*

Found

POLICEMEN are still puzzled over the death of security guard Joebert Gancia, whose body was found inside a drum at a construction site in Quezon City on Monday. Investigators said Gancia, 25, a security guard of the Success Private Detective Security Agency, was assigned to guard a construction site on Dapitan Street, Barangay Lourdes, Quezon City. According to a Central Police District report, a warehouseman identified as Sergio Sayno found the body inside a steel drum as he was cleaning the site at around 10 a.m. Scene of the crime investigators said Gancia had been dead for three days. They found several stab wounds on his body. *Alcuin Papa*

Nabbed

A FORMER altar boy wanted for at least 14 criminal cases, including murder, has been arrested in Caloocan City last weekend, police said. PO1 Vladimir Binayug led a team of Caloocan investigators in arresting Dennis Manalo, 20, a native of Bacolod City and a resident of Bagong Silang, Caloocan. Senior Supt. Benjardi Mantele, Caloocan police chief, said Manalo is the city's most wanted criminal and has been implicated in 14 homicide and robbery cases in the city. During questioning, Manalo admitted his hand in the murder of four persons. He also revealed to police the identities of eight his cohorts, six of whom are still at large. When Manalo's arrest was announced, several of his supposed victims and their relatives trooped to the police station to file charges. One of them was Imelda Abijuela, a public school teacher, whose son Frenime was allegedly killed by Manalo on Dec. 15. She claimed Manalo was fleeing from a robbery scene when he shot her son in the chest. *Tina Santos*

Shot

A FEMALE drug dealer was killed on Monday when she tried to sell tawas to drug users, police said. The victim, known only as "Tisay," was shot several times at around 11:15 a.m. in an alley in Payatas D, Quezon City. Central Police District lawmen believed that the victim was killed when she tried to pass of tawas as shabu contained in a plastic sachet. The three suspects might have found out about the switch and killed the victim in cold blood. *Alcuin Papa*

People, Events & Products

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McCann-Erickson marks anniversary with public service campaign

TO CELEBRATE its 100th anniversary, McCann-Erickson World Group has launched a global public service effort titled 1000 Voices, 100 Years which encouraged all offices within its network to identify and embrace causes important to the countries in which they operate. Emily Abrera, chair of McCann-Erickson Philippines, says, "Yes, the celebration may be global, but the public concerns we will tackle are definitely local."

In the Philippines, McCann's research has confirmed a general feeling of despair among Filipinos due to the country's long list of unsolved social issues. Many expressed the belief that if the government with all its resources and power can't do anything about the traffic mess or the peace and order situation, what can an average citizen do? Filipinos often bewail the situation, but leave it up to the government to solve the myriad problems in society today.

To help the country overcome this malaise, McCann Erickson Philippines has created a new public service ad campaign. It is built on the insight that it's impossible to clean up the mess in the country if no one wants to begin by cleaning up the mess in his own front yard. Bong Banal, the art director who came up with the idea for the campaign, says, "We wanted a campaign that would remind Filipinos that they are empowered to create change. And the way to do that is to focus on small steps, everyday positive acts anyone can do."

The way the ad campaign got produced was certainly in keeping with the spirit of the campaign. A lot of people did a lot of little things. Charlie Altomonte, a well-known photographer, donated one Saturday to take the pictures. Femar, a strategic partner of McCann, did all the pre-press work for free. And the major dailies gave precious support. Ricki Arches, president of McCann-Erickson Philippines and an ardent supporter of the project, says, "I can't think of a better way for McCann-Erickson to celebrate its centennial. We've won the award for best in community service at the Agency of the Year awards every time we've joined the competition. I think this campaign is a reaffirmation of our tradition of giving back to the community in which we do business."

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SHELLANE LPG PARTNERS WITH C-CUBED

Customer Contact Center Inc. (C-Cubed), a fast-growing call center, increases its local market share with the addition of Shellane Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG). Shellane LPG, the LPG brand trusted by more households for over 30 years. selected C-Cubed to manage its call center requirements and to further improve its existing customer relations services. The addition of Shellane LPG to C-Cubed's foreign and domestic clients further expands the latter's share in the call center industry. Shown (from left, seated) are Nat Wong, Shellane LPG general manager, and Eckie Gonzales, chief executive officer, C-Cubed. Standing, from left, are Anne Chua, call center team leader, Jan Bengzon, account management and public affairs general manager, C-Cubed, Jeffrey Navarro, LPG project implementation manager, and Jean Gregorio, account director, C-Cubed.

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AYALAPORT SIGNS CONTRACT WITH SSS

AyalaPort formally signed a contract with the Social Security System (SSS) for its accreditation as an SSS value-added network (VAN) Nov. 18 at the SSS offices in Quezon City. AyalaPort hosts an Internet portal for SSS—called SSSNet—and its partner employers and banks. Over 400 employers have already subscribed to the SSSNet program. Employers who are members can electronically remit and report the SSS contributions of their employees. According to Felipe Cariño, SSS vice president for coverage and collection (2nd from left), the program facilitates processing of transactions and efficient posting of payments. Shown (from left) are Alberto Alburo, SSS assistant vice president for contributions collection program management, Carino, Brigs Merin, AyalaPort general manager, and Herns Hermida, AyalaPort business development head.

Reimburse mid-year tuition through Citibank Paylite

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Under this program, Citibank credit cardholders who have already paid tuition can reimburse the entire amount and have it charged to their account in lighter monthly installments—leaving them with cash to fund other expenses. The PayLite Tuition Reimbursement option lets you appreciate the benefits of paying for the high cost of tuition in 3, 6, 9, or 12 easy installments at low interest rates.

To avail yourself of this valuable offer, simply call the Citibank hotline at 423-3000 from Mondays to Fridays. A friendly sales representative will then instruct you to fax the tuition receipts at a designated number. Only receipts for this school year and from DECS/CHED-accredited schools are valid, and the minimum amount for tuition reimbursement is P3,000.

Once approved, a check will then be delivered to your billing address, and charged to your Citibank credit card account under the PayLite monthly installment that you chose. Reimburse today and get free books and discount coupons from MSA Tutorial and Review Center, Lessons.ph and John Robert Powers International.

You can also win a brand new Volkswagen Beetle. Until Feb. 15, every P3,000 charged to Citibank PayLite will give you an electronically generated raffle number to the Citibank PayLite Beetlemania promotion, where you have the chance to win one of four fully loaded Volkswagen New Edition Beetles.

Winners will be drawn in the raffle draws on Jan. 19 and March 23.

For details, call the 24-hour Citiphone at 995-9999 in Metro Manila or 234-9999 in Metro Cebu, or visit www.citibank.com.ph.

IBM ACQUIRES IBM SERVERS ON BASED ON INTEL

Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI) and application service provider T-Systems recently acquired IBM xSeries x440 servers based on Intel Xeon processor MP. Introduced in 2002, the x440 is a powerful Intel processor-based server designed to meet the performance, reliability and scalability requirements of corporate data center customers. The IBM eServer xSeries x440 is designed with EXA technology for mainframe-like computing capabilities within the Intel-based platform. Shown are IBM and Intel officials with BPI and T-Systems representatives (from left) Christopher Syling, IBM Philippines eServer xSeries technical sales specialist, Dan David, IBM Philippines enterprise systems group country manager, Randee Gutana, T-Systems technical support and operations manager, Noel Tagaza, BPI vice president for e-commerce, Ricky Banaag, Intel Microelectronics Philippines country manager, and Paolo Lopez, Intel Microelectronics business development manager for Philippines and Thailand.

An 'expressway' to real Bicol Express

DELICIOUSLY spicy is how we Filipinos describe the taste of Bicol Express. Unfortunately, time consuming is how we describe its preparation.

Well, there's now an "expressway" to real Bicol Express, as this spicy Pinoy delicacy is now conveniently packed in cans. Moonbake Inc. introduces Moondish Bicol Express!, the first ready-to-eat Bicol Express in a can. It's a mixture of fresh chili pepper, bits of tasty meat and other spices simmered in delicious coconut cream (gata). It's specially prepared to truly capture the real taste of homemade preparation and vacuum-packed with no MSG and no preservatives but guaranteed to last a good year.

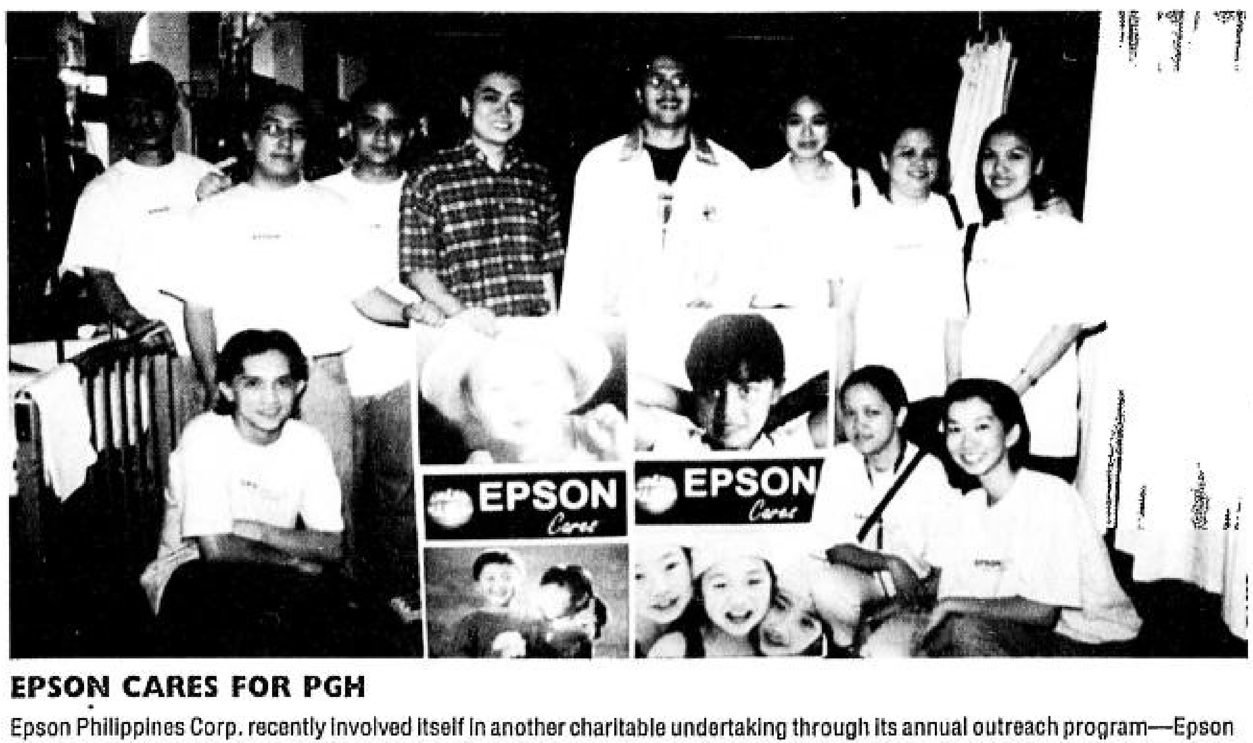
Moondish Bicol Express comes in Tuna Flakes and in Vegetarian Style variants. Moondish Ready-To-Eat Bicol Express is already available in major supermarkets and grocery stores in GMA and selected provinces. Interested customers and distributors may contact Moonbake Inc. at 801-8320 or 802-8301.

NESLAC CAPTURES THE BONDING MOMENT

Nestle Neslac, together with the BIG Picture Productions, recently had a successful pre-school tour in various places in Metro Manila. The schools that they visited were Child's Place and Holy Family Parochial School in Quezon City, Child Learning Center in Makati, Action Kidz in Discovery Suites, Ortigas and Gymboree Play and Music at Rockwell Center. It was a pre-Christmas event filled with fun, entertainment and exciting activities. Kids had an enjoyable time at the kiddie rides and other activities prepared by Neslac. They also had a wonderful time with Neslac's very own Blue Bear. Segments of the program included an entertaining and informative puppet show, which tackled the nutritional benefits of Neslac that would help youngsters grow strong, smart and tougher against sickness.

Pinoy scholar

ANDRE Peter Cabuay Estanislao, a valedictorian graduate of Manresa School in BF Homes, Parañaque City (1999-2000), a full scholar of the United World Colleges at Pearsons College in Victoria, Canada (2000-2001) and now a 4-year full scholar at Middlebury College in Vermont, has been recently awarded by the Middlebury College administration and faculty the 2002 First Year Achievement Award given to students with academic excellence and who have demonstrated the ability to relate well with others. André is also a recipient of the Gloria Macapagal Arroyo Leadership Award in Manresa School upon graduation. He is the son of Mr and Ms Augusto and Patti Estanislao of BF Homes, Parañaque City.



EPSON CARES FOR PGH

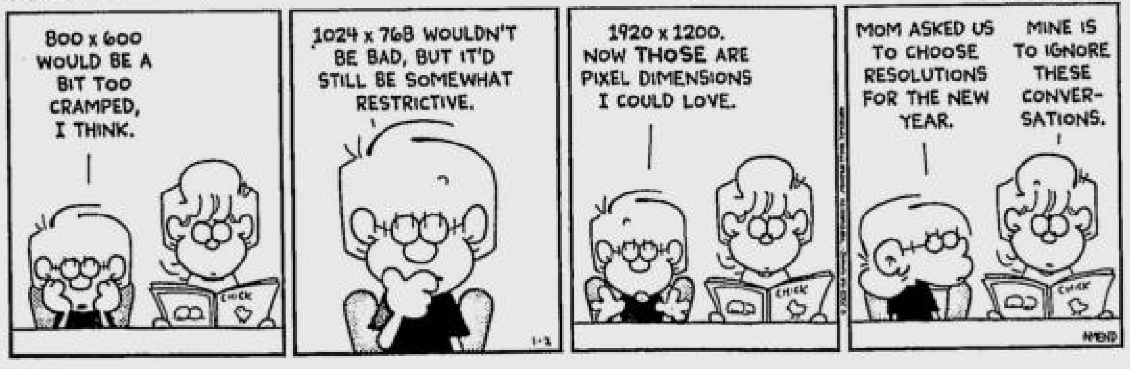
Epson Philippines Corp. recently involved itself in another charitable undertaking through its annual outreach program—Epson Cares. Epson Cares this year heeded the call of Dr. Philip Cruz MD, chief resident of the PGH Pediatric Charity Wards 9 and 11 to spearhead the Give A Life campaign to provide medicine and upgrade pediatric equipment used by the country's biggest charity hospital. Shown with Epson volunteers (from left) Ronnel Zuniga, Nonie Gloria, Jerry Isturis, Lee de Gala, Beth Alcantara, Miriam Gonzales (seated) Renz Gavarra, Ella dela Cruz, and Mireille de Guia are Drs. Cruz and Romillie E. Cruz receiving the gifts for the hospital ward.

TUGUEGARAO WEST CENTRAL TOPS ART TILT

Ina Bianca Vagay, Dina Roe Ancheta and Mark Irah Matias of Tuguegarao West Central School won the grand prize in the 1st Smart Creations Transforming The Future With Smarties Art Contest, besting 25 other finalists from different schools from all over Luzon. The winning team received P20,000 while their school received P30,000 worth of audio-video equipment. The competition was for elementary school students who 'transformed' 32-gram and 18-gram Smarties boxes into beautiful works of art such as an amusement park, automobiles, boats, a robot, and a church. Shown are the winning members of Tuguegarao West Central School flanked by Star Estacio (right), vice president; Integrated Trade Marketing, Nestle Philippines and Wendy So (left), executive, Integrated Trade Marketing, Nestle Philippines.

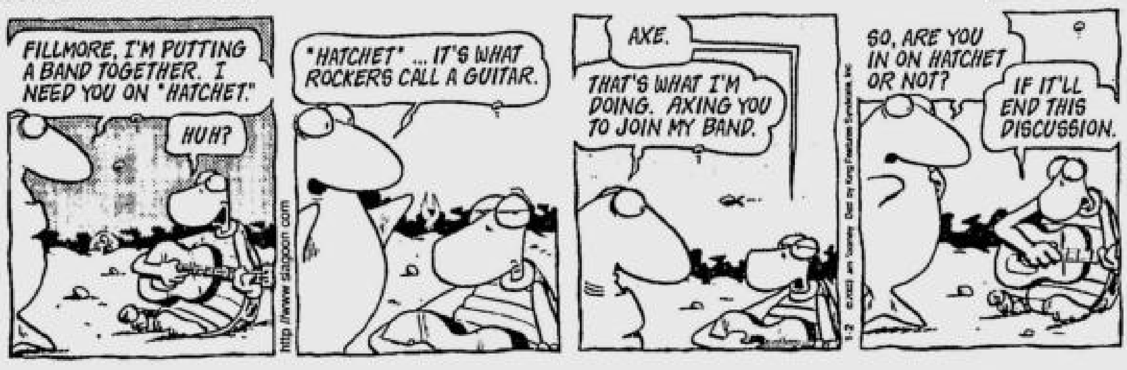
FOXTROT

BY BILL AMEND


800 x 600 WOULD BE A BIT TOO CRAMPED, I THINK.
1024 x 768 WOULDN'T BE BAD, BUT IT'D STILL BE SOMEWHAT RESTRICTIVE.
1-2
1920 x 1200. NOW THOSE ARE PIXEL DIMENSIONS I COULD LOVE.
MOM ASKED US TO CHOOSE RESOLUTIONS FOR THE NEW YEAR.
MINE IS TO IGNORE THESE CONVERSATIONS.
AMEND

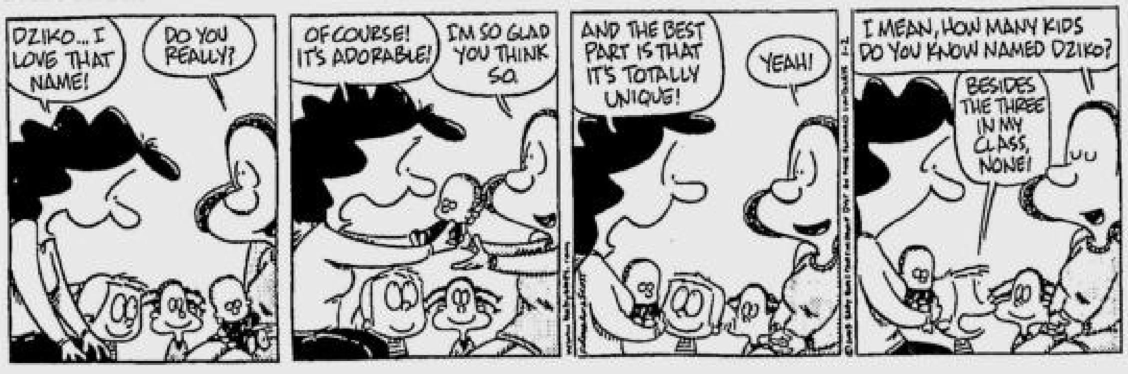
SHERMAN'S LAGOON

BY JIM TOOMEY


FILLMORE, I'M PUTTING A BAND TOGETHER. I NEED YOU ON "HATCHET."
HUH?
"HATCHET" ... IT'S WHAT ROCKERS CALL A GUITAR.
AXE.
THAT'S WHAT I'M DOING. AXING YOU TO JOIN MY BAND.
SO, ARE YOU IN ON HATCHET OR NOT?
IF IT'LL END THIS DISCUSSION.
http://www.slagoon.com

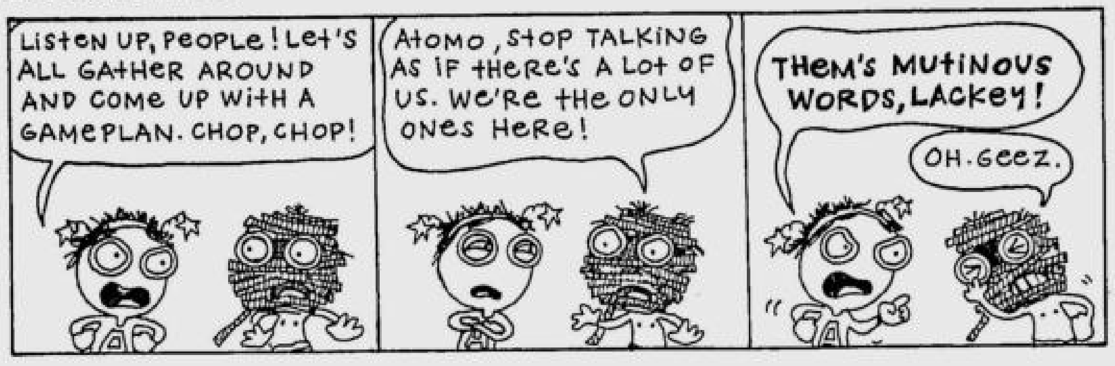
BABY BLUES

BY JERRY SCOTT


DZIKO... I LOVE THAT NAME!
DO YOU REALLY?
OF COURSE! IT'S ADORABLE!
I'M SO GLAD YOU THINK SO.
AND THE BEST PART IS THAT IT'S TOTALLY UNIQUE!
YEAH!
I MEAN, HOW MANY KIDS DO YOU KNOW NAMED DZIKO?
BESIDES THE THREE IN MY CLASS, NONE!

ATOMO AND WEBOY

BY LYRA GARCELLANO


Listen up, people! Let's all gather around and come up with a gameplan. Chop, chop!
Atomo, stop talking as if there's a lot of us. We're the only ones here!
Them's mutinous words, lackey!
Oh. Geez.

HOROSCOPE

BY EUGENIA LAST

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Christy Turlington, Cuba Gooding Jr., Isaac Asimov, Tia Carrere

HAPPY BIRTHDAY: You will have added discipline this year that will allow you to finish what you start and maintain a level of integrity that will put you in a positive light in other people's eyes. This is a time of new beginnings and you can accomplish all you set out to do. Put time and effort into your own pursuits. Your numbers are 5, 19, 27, 30, 36, 44

ARIES (March 21-April 19): Don't get involved in clubs or organizations that will cost you big bucks to join. A disagreement with a friend is likely to occur if you forgot to fulfill a promise.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20): Remain calm. Nothing is worth arguing about today. You have better and more important things to accomplish, so be positive.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20): You will accomplish the most if you take the initiative and do the work yourself. A personal connection may be superficial. Ask precise questions before you let this union develop any further.

CANCER (June 21-July 22): Say what you think and clear the air today. Make up your mind concerning what you want and don't budge to accommodate someone unworthy of your kindness.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): Your ideas are sound and if you act upon them, money can be made. The changes you've been considering should be put into play. For starters, find a new pet or rearrange your furniture.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): You won't be sorry if you take the time to put extra detail into your hobbies or your creative work. Don't let friends or family talk you into spending more than you can afford.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): Don't let someone upset you today. You have to remind yourself what it is that you really want out of life. Accept the fact that you must make a decision.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): This is not the time to let others dictate what you should or shouldn't be doing. You will have to defend your rights and your beliefs at all costs. Make your own decisions.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): Take a realistic look at your finances. This is not the day to gamble or make bets with friends. If you are foolish in your financial pursuits, losses can be expected.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Point out your ideas and intentions to the people you feel are most likely to assist you. Concentrate on getting ahead in business. Your hard work will bring you the highest returns.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): You can get involved in a solid partnership that could lead to a brighter future. Involvement with clubs or fun organizations will bring you good fortune.

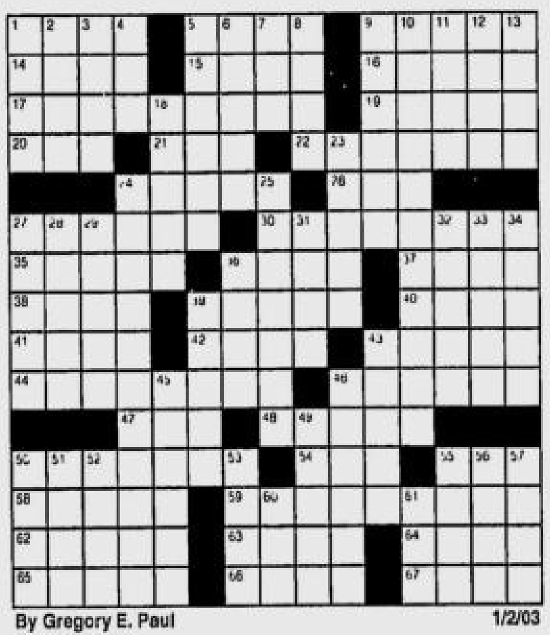
PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): Consider making some changes in your life and in your friendships that will help you feel better about yourself. Travel will promote adventure and bring you added knowledge.

Birthday Baby: Once you set your mind on something, you will be persistent until you get what you want. This can work to your advantage, however, you will have to learn to compromise once in a while if you want to get along with others.

DAILY CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1 One of Willy Loman's boys
5 Nav. rank
9 In flames
14 Plenty
15 __-Romeo
16 Of an arm bone
17 Twenty-one
19 Arranges by category
20 Designer's inits.
21 __ de plume
22 Wind together
24 Big-time criminal
26 Wide shoe size
27 Grand __ Dam
30 Hobo's home?
35 Queen __ lace
36 Breeder horse
37 Faded
38 Pleasant city in France?
39 Fine of the Three Stooges
40 Depression-era migrant
41 Lummox
42 Lab gel
43 Avow
44 Biased
46 Harvest blubber
47 Half a fly?
48 Goof
50 Impair steadily
54 "The Raven" poet's initials
55 Comic Abbott
58 Bay window
59 U.S.-USSR contest
62 Partnered
63 Nothing in Spanish
64 __ of Dogs
65 Metal sheet
66 Former mates
67 Materiel



By Gregory E. Paul
Scottdale, PA

1/2/03

DOWN

1 Term of endearment
2 Woes
3 Young equine
4 Govt. economics agcy.
5 Wheedle
6 Texas shrine
7 Lowly mil. rank
8 Make off with
9 Author of "Emma"
10 Hippie catchphrase
11 Inscription on the cross
12 Charlie Brown's exclamation
13 In the past, in the past
18 Joints with caps
23 Destitute
24 British press
25 Sports contract clause
27 Positive attitude
28 Beatles' song, "Glass __"
29 Remus or Sam
31 Contented murmur
32 Like old buckets
33 Assumed name
34 Plow pioneer
36 Common herb
39 Burdened
43 Slalom incline
45 Wagner woman
46 Noisy quarrel
49 "The Cloister and the Hearth" writer
50 Freebie
51 Verbal
52 Actress Moreno
53 Feudal serf
55 Foundation
56 Bruins of coll. sports
57 Moose kin
60 __ Romana
61 Trucker's truck

Wednesday's Puzzle Solved

D	A	T	A	■	R	E	N	A	L	■	B	L	O	T
A	M	I	D	■	E	L	A	R	A	■	R	E	M	O
M	A	T	A	■	P	U	T	I	N	■	A	V	O	W
P	H	O	N	Y	A	L	L	E	G	A	T	I	O	N
■	■	■	O	E	R	■	■	S	E	M	■	■	■	■
O	C	T	■	A	T	O	M	■	R	I	F	L	E	S
P	U	R	E	■	E	R	O	S	■	S	L	O	A	N
T	R	U	M	P	E	D	U	P	C	H	A	R	G	E
E	I	E	I	O	■	O	R	E	O	■	G	A	L	A
D	O	R	R	I	T	■	N	E	L	L	■	N	E	D
■	■	■	■	S	O	S	■	■	O	O	O	■	■	■
F	A	L	S	E	A	C	C	U	S	A	T	I	O	N
R	I	O	T	■	S	O	A	R	S	■	H	O	M	E
E	D	I	E	■	T	O	N	G	A	■	E	T	N	A
T	E	N	T	■	S	T	E	E	L	■	R	A	I	L

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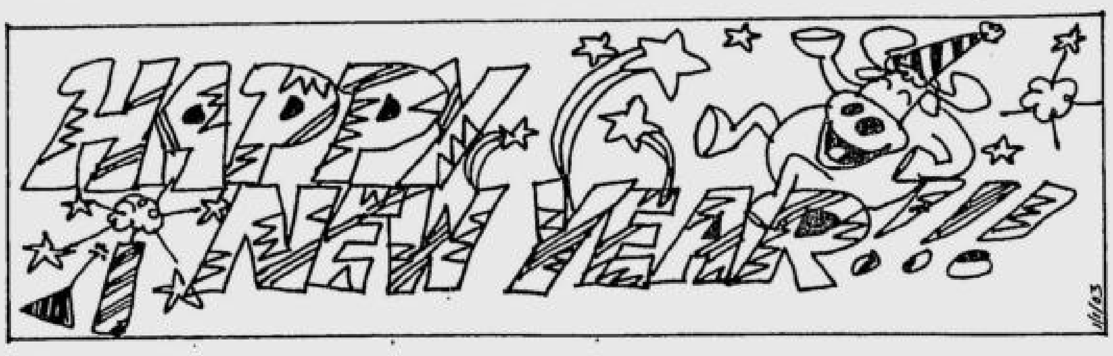
1/2/03

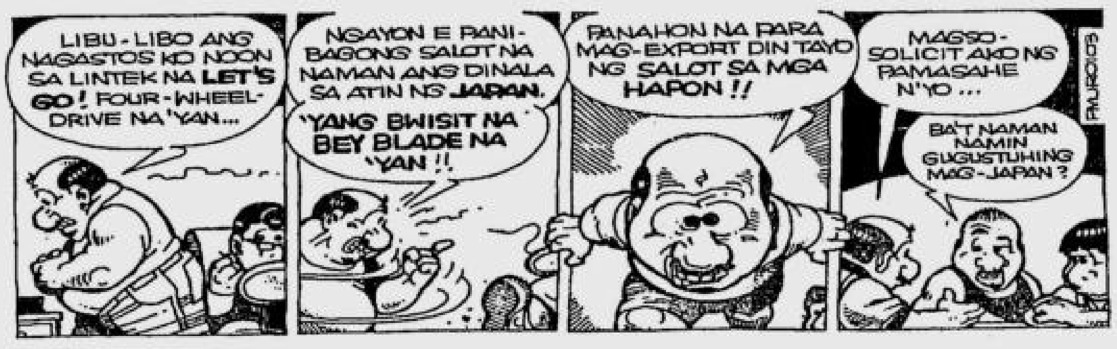
A. LIPIN

BY JESS ABRERA


HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!

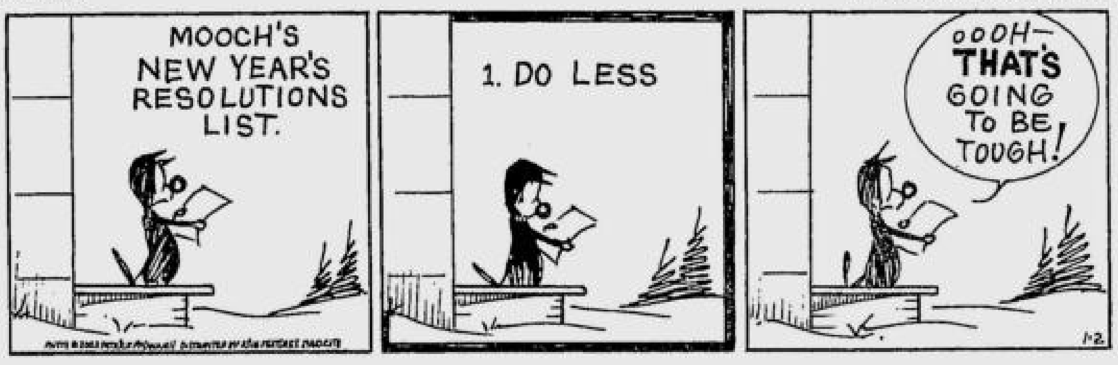
PUGAD BABOY

BY P.M. JUNIOR


LIBU-LIBO ANG NAGASTOS KO NOON SA LINTEK NA LET'S GO! FOUR-WHEEL-DRIVE NA 'YAN...
NGAYON E PANIBAGONG SALOT NA NAMAN ANG DINALA SA ATIN NG JAPAN.
'YANG BWISIT NA BEY BLADE NA 'YAN!!
PANAHON NA PARA MAG-EXPORT DIN TAYO NG SALOT SA MGA HAPON!!
MAGSO-SOLICIT AKO NG PAMASAHE N'YO...
BA'T NAMAN NAMIN GUGUSTUHING MAG-JAPAN?
PMJR.0103

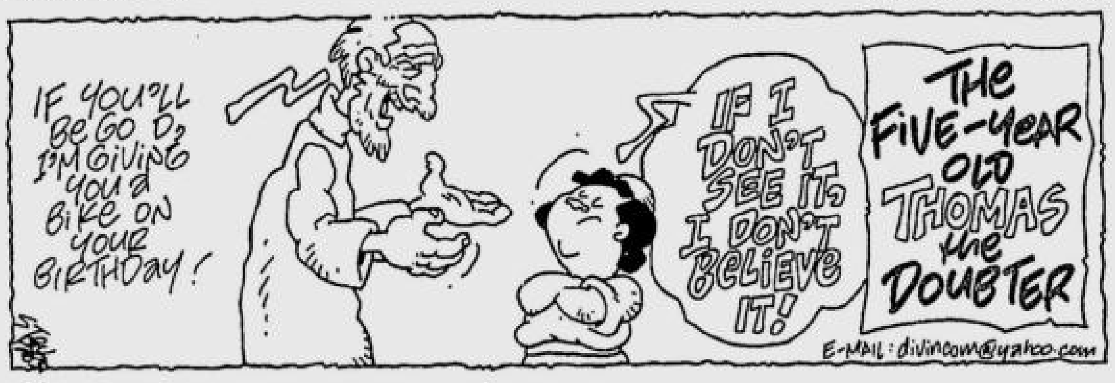
MUTTS

BY PATRICK McDONNELL


MOOCH'S NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS LIST.
1. DO LESS
OOOH— THAT'S GOING TO BE TOUGH!
1-2

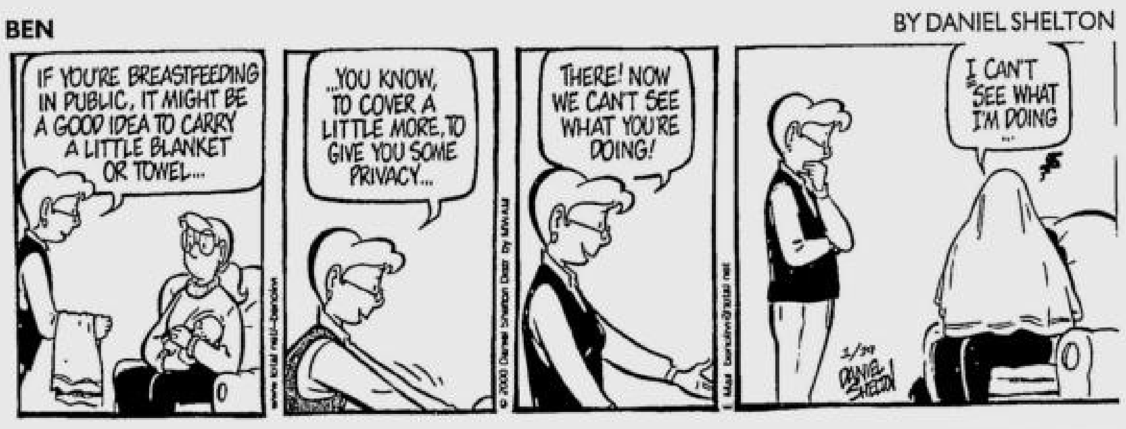
DIVINE COMEDY

BY STEVEN PABALINAS


IF YOU'LL BE GOOD, I'M GIVING YOU A BIKE ON YOUR BIRTHDAY!
IF I DON'T SEE IT, I DON'T BELIEVE IT!
THE FIVE-YEAR OLD THOMAS THE DOUBTER
E-MAIL: divincom@yahoo.com

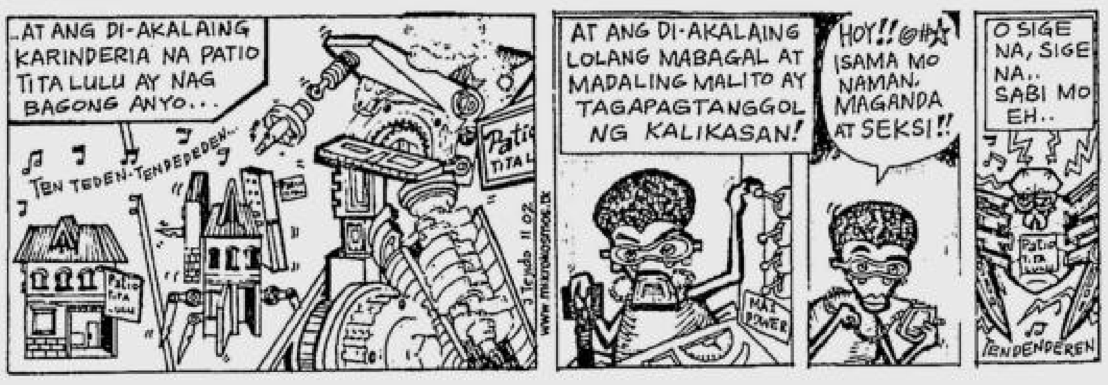
BEN

BY DANIEL SHELTON


IF YOU'RE BREASTFEEDING IN PUBLIC, IT MIGHT BE A GOOD IDEA TO CARRY A LITTLE BLANKET OR TOWEL...
...YOU KNOW, TO COVER A LITTLE MORE, TO GIVE YOU SOME PRIVACY...
THERE! NOW WE CAN'T SEE WHAT YOU'RE DOING!
I CAN'T SEE WHAT I'M DOING
DANIEL SHELTON

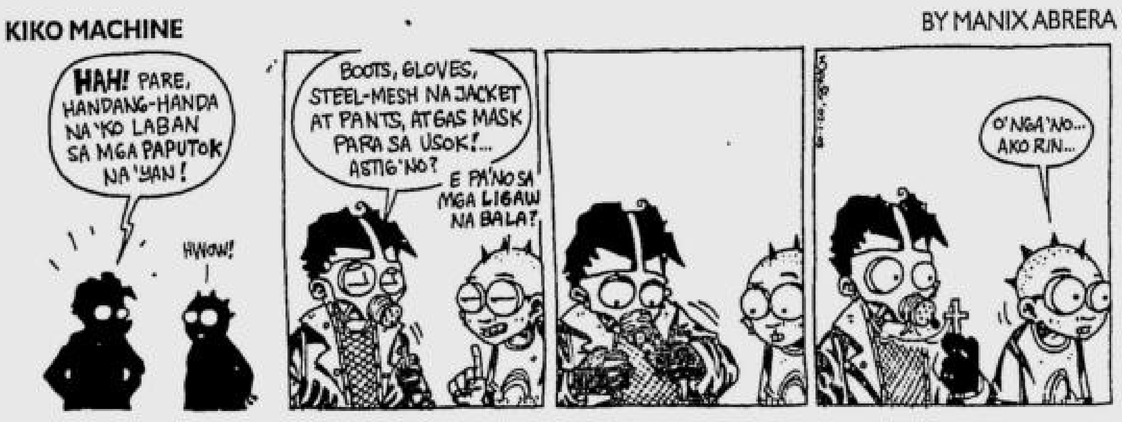
MIKROKOSMOS

BY JOMIKE TEJIDO


...AT ANG DI-AKALAING KARINDERIA NA PATIO TITA LULU AY NAG BAGONG ANYO...
TEN TEDEN-TENDEDEDEN...
AT ANG DI-AKALAING LOLANG MABAGAL AT MADALING MALITO AY TAGAPAGTANGGOL NG KALIKASAN!
HOY!! @#$! ISAMA MO NAMAN. MAGANDA AT SEKSI!!
O SIGE NA, SIGE NA.. SABI MO EH..
TENDENDEREN
J. Tejido 11.02 www.mikrokosmos.tk

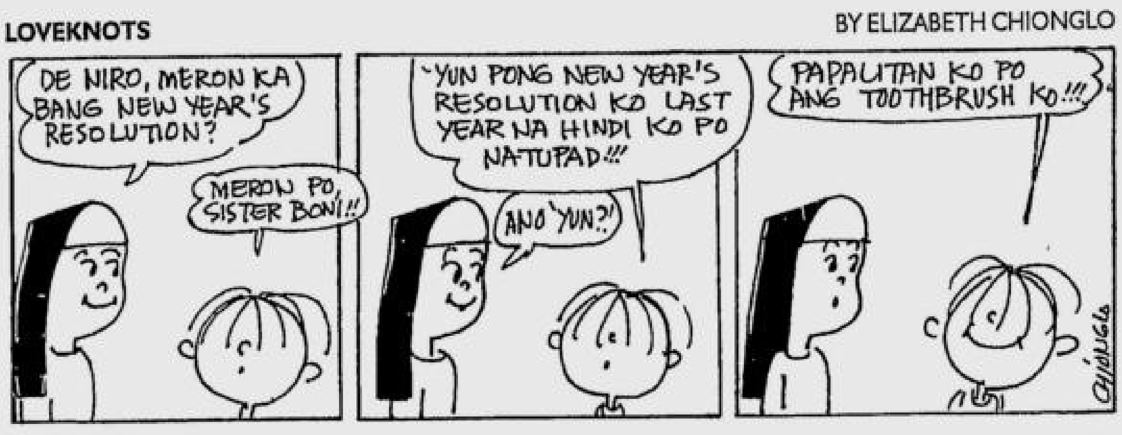
KIKO MACHINE

BY MANIX ABRERA


HAH! PARE, HANDANG-HANDA NA'KO LABAN SA MGA PAPUTOK NA 'YAN!
HWOW!
BOOTS, GLOVES, STEEL-MESH NA JACKET AT PANTS, AT GAS MASK PARA SA USOK!... ASTIG 'NO?
E PA'NO SA MGA LIGAW NA BALA?
O'NGA 'NO... AKO RIN...

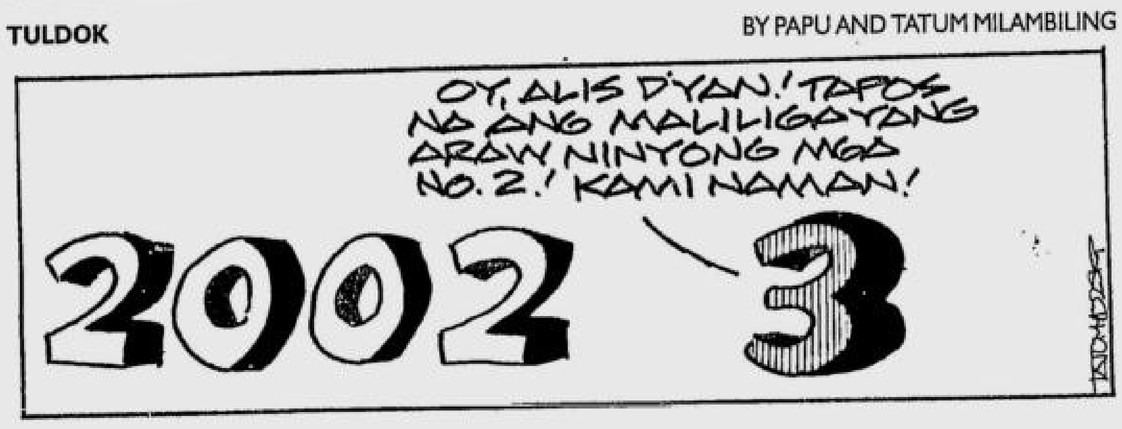
LOVEKNOTS

BY ELIZABETH CHIONGLO


DE NIRO, MERON KA BANG NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION?
MERON PO, SISTER BONI!!
'YUN PONG NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION KO LAST YEAR NA HINDI KO PO NATUPAD!!!
ANO 'YUN?!
PAPALITAN KO PO ANG TOOTHBRUSH KO!!!
CHIONGLO

TULDOK

BY PAPU AND TATUM MILAMBILING


OY, ALIS D'YAN! TAPOS NA ANG MALIGAYANG ARAW NINYONG MGA NO. 2! KAMI NAMAN!
2002
3

'Dekada '70': Chito Roño's manifesto

By Nini Valera

REVIEW

SO shoot me.

Chito Roño's "Dekada '70," this year's Metro Manila Film Festival's second best picture, is tops for me.

Not because I lived the decade and danced to its music and gave my mother the same Kahlil Gibran poem about your children not being your children but the sons and daughters of the universe—something like that—which figured in the movie, and fleshed out the pain in Vilma Santos' mother role.

It was one of the most powerful moments in the film, full of undertones and unabashed celebrations for surviving the most tumultuous decade of the last century.

In that scene, a stoic Amanda Bartolome (Vilma), mother of five boys (Piolo Pascual, Carlos Agassi, Marvin Agustin, Danilo Barrios, John Wayne Sace) and wife of a chauvinist (Christopher de Leon) was cleaning the room of her eldest son Jules (Pascual), who had gone underground, so that her other son Jason (Barrios) could move into it.

Jules had sent her mother the Kahlil Gibran poem.

With Jason rejoicing in the background, Amanda mumbles, "*Hindi ko naman daw anak, nagdaan lang naman sa akin*. (He is not my son, he just passed through me)."

This was the moment of Amanda's acceptance of Jules' convictions, even if she still could not reconcile her role in the changing landscape of her universe.

Despite its title, "Dekada '70" is not all about political activism. It's about a woman's struggle to become more than a wife and a mother. It's about finding a career and about being proud of herself.

It's about Vilma Santos playing her age in a movie, and defying the harsh lights and the unforgiving close-ups.

With the events of the '70s intruding into her family's life, Amanda comes to terms with herself and her losses.

As usual, Roño has brought out the best in his performers.

Restraint was all over the movie: From Christopher, who could not cry despite the death of a son, to Vilma, who kept her discontent in her heart, to the actors who played their sons and in whom you would see a brother, a boyfriend, a husband, a professor, a managing editor.

ROÑO. "Dekada '70" director.

The bottomline is that they are husband and wife, and why shouldn't they laugh and cry together in the end.

Lualhati Bautista, who wrote the novel in which the movie was based, had drawn from characters whom she had known in the '70s, like the salvage victim whose body was found at the back of the Ramada Hotel in Ermita, the disappeared professor-activist Charlie Del Rosario, according to Roño.

The torture scenes of Jules when he was caught by the military were based on an actual documented case, he said.

"I interviewed people who lived through the torture, like the mother whose son was shot in the stomach and was tortured by soldiers by poking the barrel of a long gun into the wound and stirring his intestines with it," he said. "That was how the mother described it to me and it was in Hati's dialogue."

Roño, too, is fairly acquainted with the decade and with the generals who were in power. His father, the late Jose S. Roño, was Ferdinand Marcos' deputy prime minister.

"I was in high school when Martial Law was proclaimed," he recalled. "At that time, we were in Samar and my father was governor. I remember that while we were watching Marcos on TV, I asked my father what Martial Law meant.

"My father, even if he was a lawyer, did not know much what it meant. The first thing he did was meet with the mayors and they talked among themselves."

The next day, soldiers arrived in their house to pick up his father.

"I was scared. He was carrying his leather bag where you could fit in two pairs of pants. He waived at me so I thought it was fine."

His mother Carol explained to him that Marcos had called, asking for his father's service in the new society the strongman would create.

"Dekada '70" might not be the ultimate film about the '70s, but it is Roño's vision of a world that was flawed, awesome, even frightening but never to be forgotten.

"It was my time," he said.

And mine.

THE CAST of "Dekada '70." Vilma Santos with young actors Marvin Agustin, Carlos Agassi and Danilo Barrios.

FATHER and son. Christopher de Leon (right) and Piolo Pascual

How film fest judges voted in the past

By Marinel R. Cruz

THE CHAIR of the Metro Manila Film Festival Philippines (MMFFP) already knows who would win which award days before the "Gabi ng Parangal" awards ceremony, a former member of the MMFFP board of jurors said yesterday.

Award-winning playwright Bienvenido Lumbera yesterday told the INQUIRER that the chair of the festival would already be given the lists of winners by the festival auditing firm Sycip, Gorres and Velayo and Co. (SGV) days before the awards ceremony.

"The chairman would have to check the result of the SGV's computation because in the event of a tie between two or three nominees, he would have to break the tie by choosing among them," Lumbera said.

But Lumbera was quick to add that, "this information is not shared to the rest of the members of the board."

Lumbera had been a member of the board of jurors for three consecutive years from 1999 to 2001.

But Caloocan City Mayor Rey Malonzo, this year's film fest chair, said that unlike the previous years, the tabulation of the awards was finished only on the morning of Dec. 27 or several hours before the awards show.

"I didn't get to find out who the winners were until during the awards ceremony," Malonzo said. "I ordered SGV to call me in case there would be a tie. Luckily, there wasn't any."

Lumbera also said that it was the festival chair himself who would select the members of the board of jurors by sending out invitations for a meeting.

LUMBERA

The meeting would start with a discussion of the festival rules and regulations, he said. The jurors would then be oriented as to what criteria for judging they should follow.

A juror is paid approximately P1,200 for each movie that he or she would judge.

"Last year, the jurors only received about P7,500. This years' honorarium was bigger since the jurors got to view not only six but nine films," he said.

Malonzo said the jurors received P1,000 for each film they viewed.

Lumbera said the viewing is done two or three days before Christmas at the New Frontier Theater in Cubao, or at some cinema in Makati City as in the previous years.

"After this, there would usually be one afternoon reserved for the casting of votes," he explained.

The jurors are asked to follow a system of ranking which the SGV had developed.

Each judge would write on a sheet of paper the names of each nominee and their corresponding ranking. The nominees were ranked from 1 to 6, with 1 being the highest.

He said no one from among the jurors would know who among the nominees topped the ranking because each paper would be placed in a sealed envelope and would be handed over to the SGV.

Malonzo said this year's voting was done in secret. Each juror had a ballot, which they also turned over to the SGV for tabulation.

"I didn't know how the other judges voted," he said.

Lumbera said it would only take the SGV more or less three days to tally the votes, the result of which the auditing firm would usually hand over to the festival chair.

"If the chairman would care to look at the list, he would already know who would win which award," Lumbera said.

"In fact, the festival trophies, which were ordered several days before the awards show, would already carry the names of its winners."

He said that in every board, there has to be one or two technical directors or sound engineers whom the other jurors could consult when they are in doubt of which technical award should be given to whom.

What I dream for the stars

DOLLY WOOD

Dolly Ann Carvajal

WHO doesn't love to dream? I daydream a lot since I'm an insomniac, so nocturnal reveries are quite alien to me.

Allow me to let you in on my dreams for some of my good friends in show biz. Hope the start of 2003 finds you in a dreamy and not a dreary state.

I dream that:

Korina Sanchez will be intrigue-free. If you could only know her the way I do, you'll understand why she does not deserve all the flak hurled her way.

Monsour del Rosario will revive his acting career. With his martial arts expertise, he can give any action star a run for their money.

He needs no stuntmen to double for him. Mon's professionally trained to do even the most dangerous stunts (not dangerous liaisons, huh, Bro?)

Boy Abunda can be cloned. The business needs more genuinely kind and extremely fun people like him.

Cito Beltran will have his own column. Just listening to him makes me learn stuff that will outlast my own lifetime.

Pops Fernandez will be pinned down by the man whose love has no expiration date. No need for marriage contracts to be secured in the thought that your love will last. Contracts make love seem a negotiable deal.

Karen Davila will have more babies because she's such a cool working mom and what a happy baby her little boy is. He hardly cries at all and warms up to strangers instantly.

True Faith's new album "Grace," will hit the platinum mark. As their number one fan, I wish others would take time to really listen to the lyrics of each of their songs (which are all original. Leave the revivals to other bands) and be amazed when you watch True Faith perform live. As music lovers put it "Plakang plaka!" They sound as good on stage as on CD.

Ces Drilon will have access to an immortality pill. This tired world will turn around if there were more strong-willed yet soft-hearted women like her. She has the perfect mix for being serious and funny in equal parts.

Princess Punzalan will be more visible in the show biz scene again. There's a dearth of good contravida actresses like her. Everyone misses her "Selina days."

Riki Kwek will have her own talk show and I'd gladly be her co-host *gratis et amore*. Such innate charm and wit should not remain untapped for long.

Gary Valenciano will have another major hit, the likes of "Sana Maulit Muli" and "Di Na Natuto." He's got all the necessary ingredients for yet another soulful song.

Pinky Amador will have more stage plays like "The Vagina Monologues." Watching her perform is something no one can ever have enough of.

Edu Manzano will have another game show. Nobody can beat him in that arena. I'm sure you all miss his funny one-liners in "The Weakest Link," just as much as I do.

Joey de Leon will revive his "Stay Awake" late-night talk show. His sense of humor and wit are unmatched by any other host.

Pinky Webb will have more shows aside from doing the news. Such a charming and brainy lady deserves more exposure.

Sharon Cuneta will run for mayor in the next elections. Her inborn kindness (that asks for nothing in return) ought to be imbibed by politicos who live and breathe corruption.

Ogie Alcasid will have more major concerts. His "OA sa Hits" at the Big Dome last year is unparalleled in my book.

Bong Revilla Jr. will make more fantasy movies to show that we can have our own "Lord of the Rings" sort of saga. Why not a Pinoy superhero for a change?

Lorna Tolentino will have a woman's show. This beauty inside-out has got a lot to share with women of all ages out there. Enough drama shows for LT.

Liezl Martinez will have a mother-daughter type of show with Tita Nena (**Amalia Fuentes**). They have such an amazing relationship. I can say that because I'm privy to most of the phases they have been through. They would make an interesting combination on screen.

I also dream about such a show for my mom and me.

Dina Bonnevie will be loved the way she truly deserves to be loved by someone who'll do no vanishing act.

Eric Quizon will put up more branches of his hip Famous dessert bar (Greenbelt). Their yummy food and the cool crowd go together well.

Tintin Bersola and **Julius Babao** will have a hassle-free wedding preparation and a rock-solid marriage. They are set to tie the knot in December.

Quotable quotes

HERE'S the continuation of the list of quotable quotes of 2002 that Dollywood gathered all year round from an assortment of celebrities I interviewed or simply chilled out with.

Jessica Rodriguez: "I don't know why people always find a way to destroy me. I've been through hell and back. Now that I'm finally happy with **David** (**Bunevacz**), they can't seem to accept it. Happiness should not be a privilege enjoyed by a selected few. It must be free for all."

Patricia Javier: "I'm like a catsup dispenser when it comes to friends and lovers. At first I just squirt a few drops of emotion, but once I'm really squeezed, as in I feel loved and secured, all the love, trust and affection overflows."

Medwin Marfil (True Faith): "You must have faith in your fate. That's the start of Grace. It inspired us to call our new album, 'Grace.' Truth, faith and grace are by-products of one another."

Riki Kwek: "I may be a party girl who is free-spirited, but when I fall in love I turn into a softie. My world revolves around my boyfriend. Maybe that's why I'm cautious to fall again. I'll be a different Ingrid (her real name)."

Joyce Jimenez: "There's no more bitterness left that's why my ex (**Jay Manalo**) and I were able to work together harmoniously. I guess all ex-lovers must reach a point when they should let only the good memories prevail and erase all the bad ones. It's one of the most blissful and comfy states to be in."

Chin-Chin Gutierrez: "I'm more into movies that are of French and Filipino collaboration. I like to immerse myself in different cultures because unfortunately, local movies these days have not improved much. The bold genre can't seem to go away. It's already part of the Pinoy psyche."

I saved the best for last.

(My mom) **Inday Badiday**: "I'm beyond the ratings game. Before, I was the only one doing it. Now everybody is at it. So in my new show 'Heart to Heart,' I'll get to the heart of the matter. I leave the show biz intrigues to other talk shows. I can not copy my copycats."

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4 MANO PO	4 SPIRIT WARRIORS 2		4 ANG AGIMAT	4 LASTIKMAN
	5 ANG ALAMAT NG LAWIN		HOME ALONE DA RIBER	5 SPIRIT WARRIORS 2
	6 MANO PO			
	7 HULA MO... HULI KO!			

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9	LAPU LAPU

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6	ALAMAT NG LAWIN
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2	AGIMAT

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4	RESERVE

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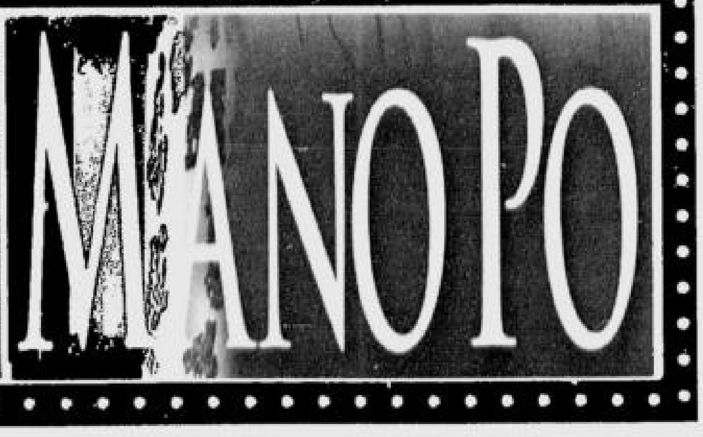

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12	LASTIKMAN

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8	LAPU LAPU
9	SPIRIT WARRIOR 2
10	HULA MO, HULI KO
11	MANO PO
12	LASTIKMAN

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12	ALAMAT NG LAWIN

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7	SPIRIT WARRIORS 2
8	AGIMAT

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3	AGIMAT
4	LASTIKMAN
5	SPIRIT WARRIORS 2
6	LASTIKMAN
7	MANO PO
8	SPIRIT WARRIORS 2
9	HULA MO, HULI KO
10	ALAMAT NG LAWIN

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2	ALAMAT NG LAWIN
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4	DEKADA '70
5	LASTIKMAN
6	SPIRIT WARRIORS 2
7	AGIMAT
8	MANO PO

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3	AGIMAT
4	MANO PO
5	LASTIKMAN
6	SPIRIT WARRIORS 2
7	CLOSED
8	HOME ALONE DA RIBER

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3	LASTIKMAN
4	DEKADA '70
5	HOME ALONE DA RIBER
6	SPIRIT WARRIORS 2

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2	MANO PO
3	AGIMAT
4	LASTIKMAN

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2	LASTIKMAN
3	MANO PO
4	AGIMAT

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2	HOME ALONE DA RIBER
3	MANO PO
4	DEKADA '70
5	LASTIKMAN
6	AGIMAT

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2	MANO PO
3	DEKADA '70
4	AGIMAT

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2	DEKADA '70
3	MANO PO
4	HOME ALONE DA RIBER

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6	AGIMAT

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6	MANO PO

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ENTERTAINMENT

Editor Louie C. Camino

'Oprah' on sex

VIEWFINDER

Nestor U. Torre

OPRAH Winfrey never ceases to surprise us. Just when we think we've got her down pat (she likes empowering her viewers, promotes reading, speaks up on issues affecting women and children), she throws us for a loop with new, unexpected topics.

Recently, she did a show on rape. She stunned her audience with a shocking statistic: one out of five American women would be sexually molested during their lifetimes. Naturally, she thought that figure was far too high, so she proceeded to go into ways to bring it down.

The most promising innovation was to tap into the DNA records of 500,000 people in the US, and match them with samples of DNA taken right after rapes have taken place.

In a test procedure, funds were found to compare 1,000 such DNA samples, and links were found in 10 cases. This meant that 10 rape cases were solved just by resorting to this simple procedure! Since serial rapists average some 16 assaults, that further meant that over a hundred women would be spared the trauma of rape.

To make viewers understand how traumatic rape can be, Oprah talked to several victims of sexual assault, who shocked viewers with their tearful and angry recollections of how they were molested. The show even played an audio tape of a rape in progress!

The "Oprah" show on rape was unexpectedly graphic and even painful to watch, but it was able to galvanize strong public support for decisive moves to unmask rapists and put them behind bars.

Also different was Oprah's show on making sex more pleasurable for women. Quite a number of the resource persons on this particular telecast admitted that they had a hard time experiencing orgasms, and were shy about telling their bedmates how to "pleasure" them.

Even Oprah was blushing as a sex therapist took out little contraptions that were supposed to be used as "sexercise" tools to firm up muscles used in the sex act, resulting in better orgasms.

But all of the delicate matters taken up in the course of the show were never offensive, because all of the people present knew what and what not to say on TV, so the telecast was different, but wasn't lewd.

More to the point, it showed what people with sexual or psychological dysfunctions could do to improve their sex lives, an important component of every marriage.

Finally, in yet another recent show, Oprah once again shocked viewers by guesting a married man who wanted sex too often from his harassed wife. You know that popular expression, "I love you three times a day"? Well, this guy meant that—in bed!

Of course, his wife couldn't match his "ardor" hence their guesting on Oprah's show to benefit from the advice of its popular resource person, Dr. **Phil** (who now has a spin-off show of his own).

Well, Dr. Phil really read the modern-day satyr the riot act. He told him that it was psychologically unhealthy to focus on sex so much. "Get a life, get a dog, get a hobby—another hobby!" The studio audience roared.

Oprah's show doesn't feature sex topics very often, but when it does, it hits the spot!

Feedback

FROM **Arthur D. Ramiro** of Quezon City: "I agree that the films of **Marilou Diaz-Abaya, Laurice Guillen** and other women directors have had a big impact on the local movie scene. Their quality and responsible movies have done a lot to compensate for the sexy movies that have given the movie industry a black eye in the eyes of the public.

"Who are the other women directors who have been active in local movies? They deserve to be given a tribute, too."

NUT's NOTES: Instructively enough, very few women have directed full-length movies in this country (many have made short films).

Currently, they include **Joyce Bernal, Rory Quintos** and **Olive Lamasan.**

In the past, the likes of **Lupita Aquino-Kashiwahara, Susana C. de Guzman, Ateng Osorio, Maria Saret, Zenaida Amador, Mitos Villareal, Carmen Concha** and **Rosa Mia** also directed films.

Up next? **Gina Alajar** could direct a film in 2003. And we trust that many more are waiting in the wings. We need at least 20 new women directors to start to even up the score in terms of gender on the local movie-directing scene.

Dynamic Youth Chorale reaps honors

THE DYNAMIC Youth Chorale (DYC) is a group of young and active music lovers under the Dynamic Youth, Incorporated.

The group was organized in 1980 with the main objective of promoting friendship and camaraderie through music, not only within the organization, but also within the Filipino-Chinese community as well.

Through the years, the choir has performed in a series of concerts at the Phil-Am Life Auditorium, namely: "Dragon's Chant" (1988), "Tune In" (1990), "Reminiscing" (1994) and "Power of the Dragon" (2000).

Their biggest dream of performing at the CCP Main Theater became a reality when "It's Dynamic" was presented in 1996.

The group has also performed in Dagupan, Cebu, Cagayan de Oro, Davao, as well as various places in Taiwan. They were also part of the thousand voices which sang "Mi Ultimo Adios" during the reenactment of Dr. Jose Rizal's life story in commemoration of his centennial death anniversary at Luneta (1996).

The DYC was also part of another thousand voices which sang "Nagnit Igak G'nan Wag 'n wag Nila," composed by NCCA Commissioner Ramon P. Santos, at the CCP Main Theater Lobby in commemoration of the centennial anniversary of Philippine independence.

POWER PLANT
CINEMA
Rockwell Center, Makati City ☎ Tel. No: 8981440-41
DOLBY DIGITAL SURROUND-EX

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AGIMAT NI LOLO GP 12:50,3:10,5:30, 7:50,10:10	LASTIKMAN GP	MANO PO GP 11:40, 2:20, 5:00, 7:40, 10:20

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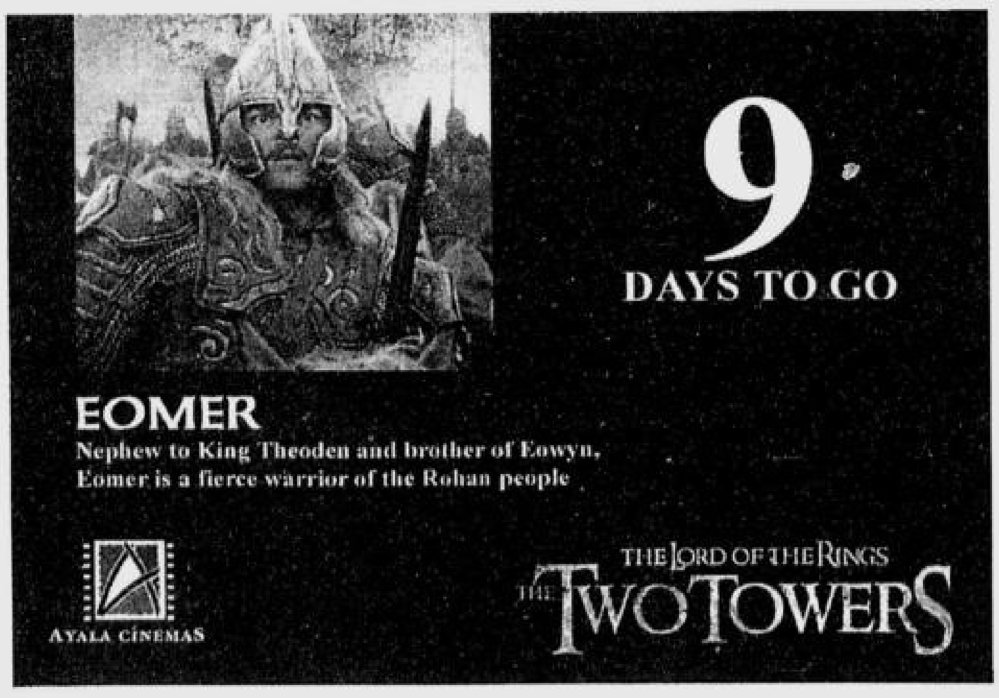
9
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Ali 1	DEKADA '70
Ali 2	LASTIKMAN
Ali 3	MANO PO LOLA
Ali 4	AGIMAT
Ali 5	SPIRIT WARRIORS: THE SHORT CUT
Ali 6	ALAMAT NG LAWIN
Ali 7	HOME ALONE DA RIBER
FARMERS PLAZA CINEMAS	
Farmers 1	LASTIKMAN
Farmers 2	AGIMAT
ARANETA COLISEUM	
DEC. 30-JAN 1-4	JOY TO THE WORLD CONCERT
JAN 11	ANAK LAUNCH
JAN 20.22 & 24	WORLD SLASHER CUP 2003
ELEPHANT WORLD	
JAN. 2	1 PM / 3 PM / 5 PM
JAN. 3	1 PM / 3 PM / 5 PM
JAN 4	1 PM / 3 PM / 5 PM

THEATER
MOVIE GUIDE

MANILA	
EASTERN	
MAXIM	CLOSED
MIRAMAR	MASIKIP MAINIT / LA FEMME EROTIQUE
ODEON	ALYAS BOMBA QUEEN
ODEON-2	VENUS / BUBOT
ROBEN	BIBINGKA
TANDEM-1	SUGAT
TANDEM-2	KATAWAN MO LANGIT KO
TIMES	RAIN OF FIRE / UNFAITHFUL
QUEZON CITY	
ACT-1	SENSUAL ISLAND
ACT-2	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT
ACT-3	ORIGINAL SIN
ACT-4	HANGGANG KAILAN KA PAPATAY
CORONET-2	AGIMAT NG LAWIN
QUEZON-1	BIBINGKA
REMAR	ITLOG
REMAR-2	UNFAITHFUL CONCUBINE
NOVA MALL - NOVALICHES CINEMA	
A	HOME ALONE DA RIBER
B	HULA MO, HULI KO
C	
MANDALUYONG CITY	
SHANGRI-LA PLAZA MALL	635-20-79 / 633-78-51 TO 70
CINEMA-1	DIE ANOTHER DAY
CINEMA-2	REPLI-KATE
CAINTA RIZAL	
STA. LUCIA EAST	(681-5401 TO 19)
CINEMA-1	LAPU LAPU
CINEMA-2	HOME ALONG DA RIBER
CINEMA-3	ALAMAT NG LAWIN
CINEMA-4 (DOLBY DIGITAL)	DEKADA 70
CINEMA-5 (DTS)	AGIMAT NI LOLO
CINEMA-6	MANO PO
CINEMA-7	HOME ALONG DA RIBER
CINEMA-8	HULA MO, HULI KO
CINEMA-9 (DTS)	ALAMAT NG LAWIN
CINEMA-10 (DOLBY DIGITAL)	MANO PO
CINEMA-11 (SDDS)	AGIMAT NI LOLO
CINEMA-12	HULA MO, HULI KO
CINEMA-14	LAPU LAPU
CINEMA-15	DEKADA 70
LORES	
CINEMA-2	SENSUAL ISLAND
CINEMA-3	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT
NE CINEMAGIC - CABANATUAN	
CINEMA 1	DIE ANOTHER DAY
CINEMA 2	BAHID
CINEMA 3	HARRY POTTER
CINEMA 4	CHANGING LINES
UNIWIDE COASTAL MALL	
(PARAÑAQUE)	SENSUAL ISLAND
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CINEMA-2	MEN IN BLACK II
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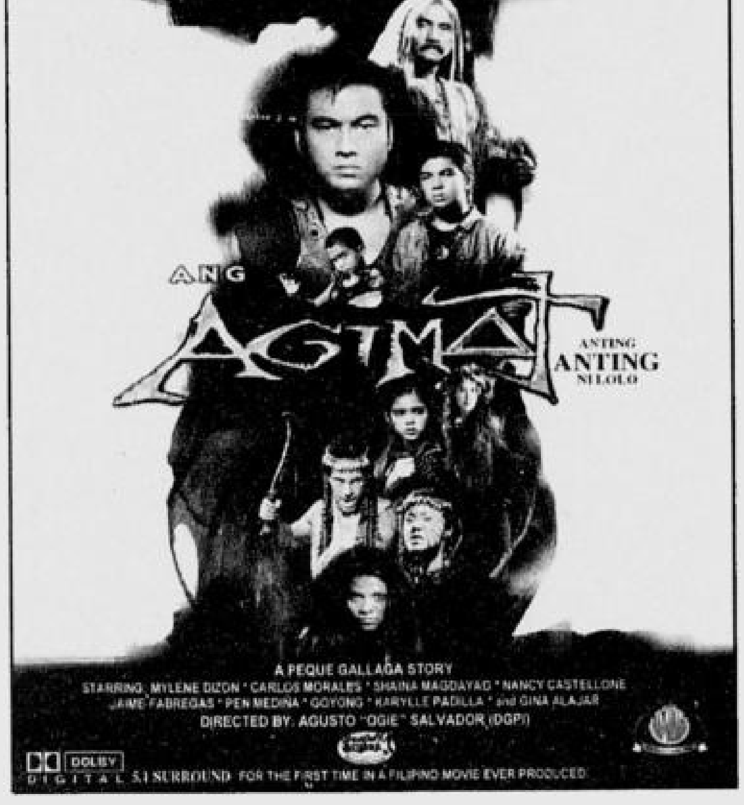
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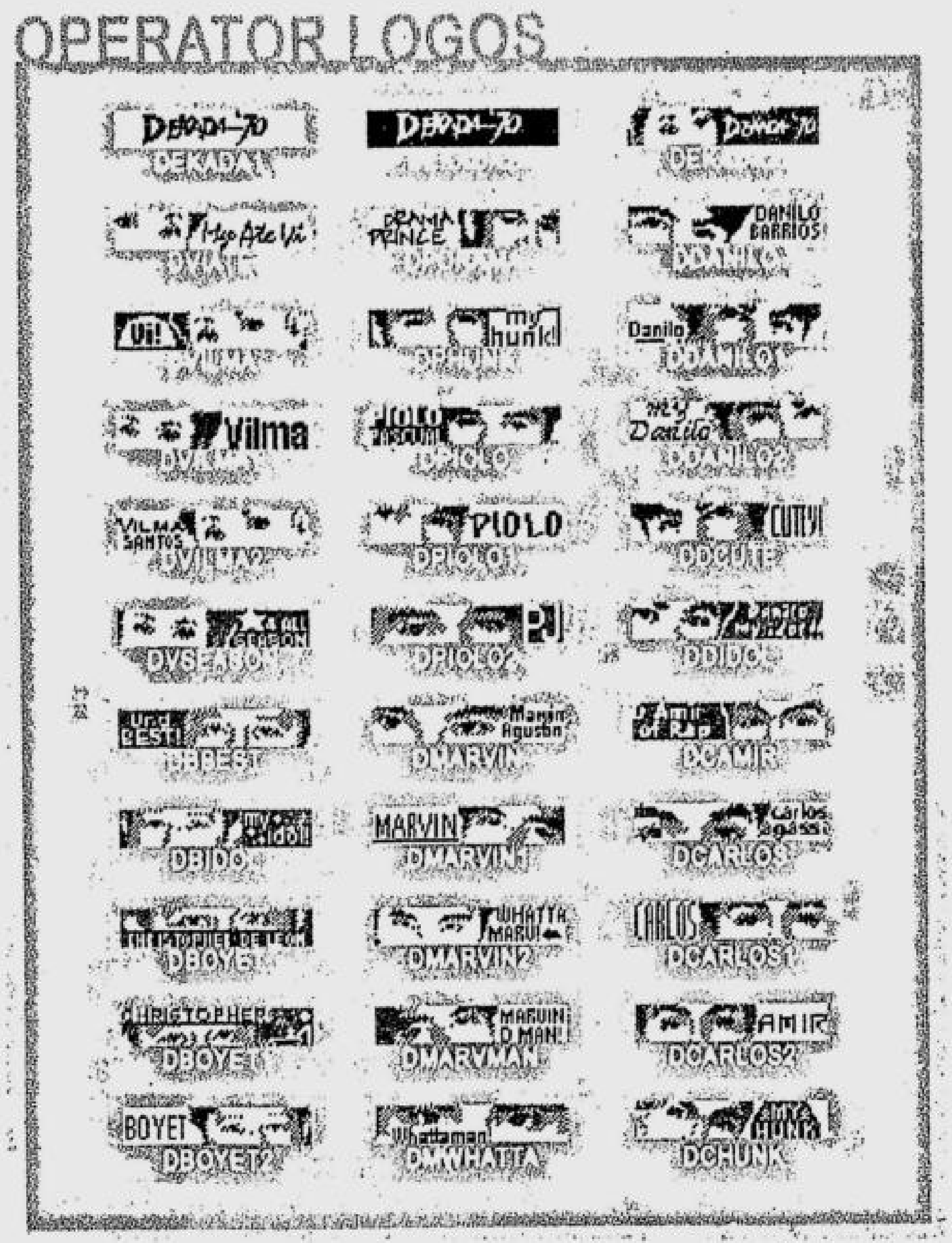

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Dekada '70
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DRAMA PRINCE
DANILO BARRIOS
Vi!
my hunk!
Danilo
DDANILO
Vilma
PIOLO PASCUAL
my Danilo
VILMA SANTOS
PIOLO
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DPIOLO2
DDIDOL
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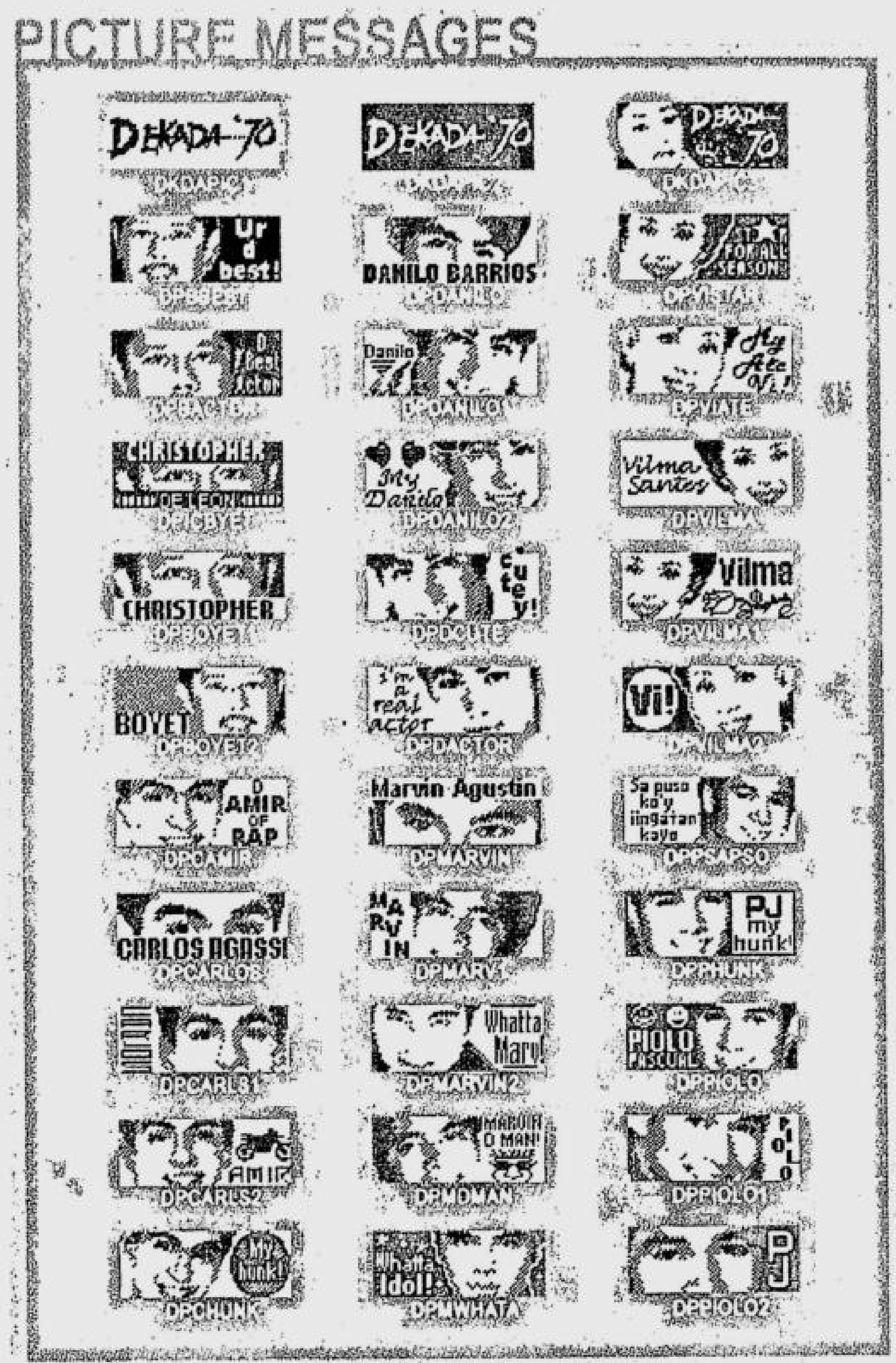

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Vilma Santos
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Cutey!
DPDCUTE
Vilma
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DPDACTOR
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DPCAMIR
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DPPSAPSO
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PJ my hunk!
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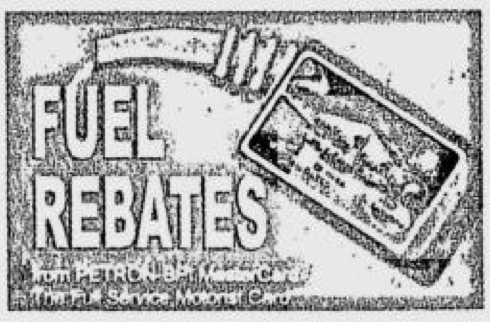

BCDA open to renegotiation of lease deals

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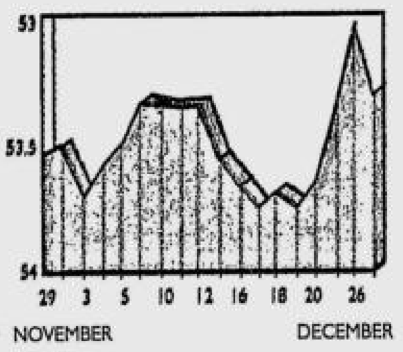

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P 53.30 = $1

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As of 5 p.m., Dec. 27, 2002

GOLD: $349.50-$350.50
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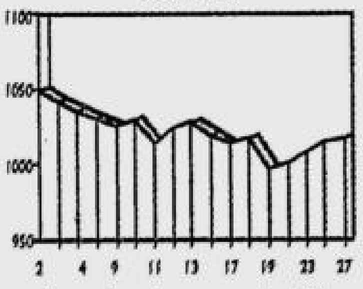
DECEMBER



(See stock market report on Page B2)

TRADING at the Philippine Stock Exchange will resume today, the first day of business of the local bourse for 2003.

Share prices closed 0.3 percent higher on Dec. 27, the last trading day of 2002, on a technical rebound and window-dressing.

"There's not much movement because it's a long holiday and there's nothing new to reckon with," Summit Securities president Harry Liu said.

The PSE composite index rose 3.08 points to close at 1,018.41. Since the end of last year, the index lost 149.67 points or 12.8 percent.

Turnover rose to 155.4 million shares worth P371.3 million compared with 60.15 million shares worth P143.06 million traded on Thursday.

The market is closed for holidays from Monday to Wednesday this week.

Strike-bound PLDT, facing resistance to work force reduction, closed unchanged at P270.

"There are bigger problems than the strike in PLDT," Liu said, referring to domestic concerns such as the budget deficit and the potential US war against Iraq.

SM Prime Holdings Inc. fell 10 centavos to P4.75, while Ayala Land Inc. was unchanged at P4.55.

Jollibee Foods Corp. gained 50 centavos to P18.25. *AFP*

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

THE BASES Conversion Development Authority is willing to renegotiate lease payment terms on its properties, such as Camp John Hay in Baguio, as long as tenants or developers take corresponding cut in their profits.

BCDA president Rufo Colayco said the BCDA was cognizant of the current economic difficulties faced by their leaseholders that finalized their contracts before the country went through the Asian financial crisis in 1997. "We cannot squeeze blood from stone," Colayco said.

Colayco said the lease terms were based on lofty assumptions and high expectations that could not be supported by the present, dismal economic conditions.

Colayco said that while the BCDA would take a reasonable stance in the renegotiations, he called on the tenants to share in the pain by also cutting down their desired profit levels. He said it would not be fair for the BCDA to agree to lower its rental fees while the tenants would maintain their shares of the projects' earnings. He said all parties must equally share the pain.

The BCDA is currently negotiating with the Fil-Estate-controlled Camp John Hay Development Corp. (CJHDC) to settle the developer's unpaid rentals in the 247-hectare Baguio leisure estate.

CJHDC wants the BCDA to honor a memorandum of agreement signed by both parties in July 2000 which allowed CJHDC to restructure its unpaid annual dues of P425 million for 1999 and 2000. CJHDC claimed that it had pumped in P2.2 billion as of 2001 with the construction of cottages, 189-room Manor Hotel, and the refurbishment of the golf course.

Under its 25-year lease contract, CJHDC will pay P425 million in annual lease payments for the first five years of the contract (the first payment was made in 1997) or 5 percent of gross revenues (whichever is higher) and P150 million yearly for the rest of the contract period. CJHDC won the bidding for the property in 1996. Colayco said he was hopeful to settle CJHDC's unpaid dues within the year with the BCDA willing to accept compensation both in cash and in kind.

DOF vows to block extension of value-added tax exemption

By Elena R. Torrijos

THE DEPARTMENT of Finance said it would block moves that would extend the exemption of professionals from payment of value-added tax.

Finance Secretary Jose Isidro Camacho said he would ask President Macapagal-Arroyo to veto the bill if Congress would approve it.

The finance department earlier warned that extending the VAT exemption would deprive the government some P8.5 billion in revenue.

Camacho said he was also opposing moves by certain quarters in Congress to get the President to certify the bill as urgent.

Both the DOF and the Department of Budget and Management are instead endorsing the Fiscal Responsibility Bill which will ensure that any revenue-losing tax measure will go hand-in-hand with a corresponding revenue-generating legislation.

The finance department has also been batting for the passage of a bill to index excise taxes on alcohol and liquor products to inflation. This is seen to generate as much as P13.5 billion in revenue per year for the national government.

"We should be allocating something for any revenue losing measure, otherwise the government fiscal program will be affected," Camacho said.

The government has been grappling with poor revenue collections and higher expenditures that have bloated the budget deficit to P200.55 billion in the first 11 months.

The full-year 2002 budget deficit is expected to hit P223 billion, this is seen to fall to P202 billion this year, based on the revised medium-term plan of the national government.

Last year, the national government had to contend with the salary adjustment of the military and the police, the increase in veterans' pension and the impact of the new teaching positions in the second half of the year.

PNOC unit taps S. Arabian firms for gas projects

By Ronnel W. Domingo

PNOC Energy Development Corp. said it was in talks with Saudi Arabian firms on possible joint ventures in natural gas exploration projects in the country.

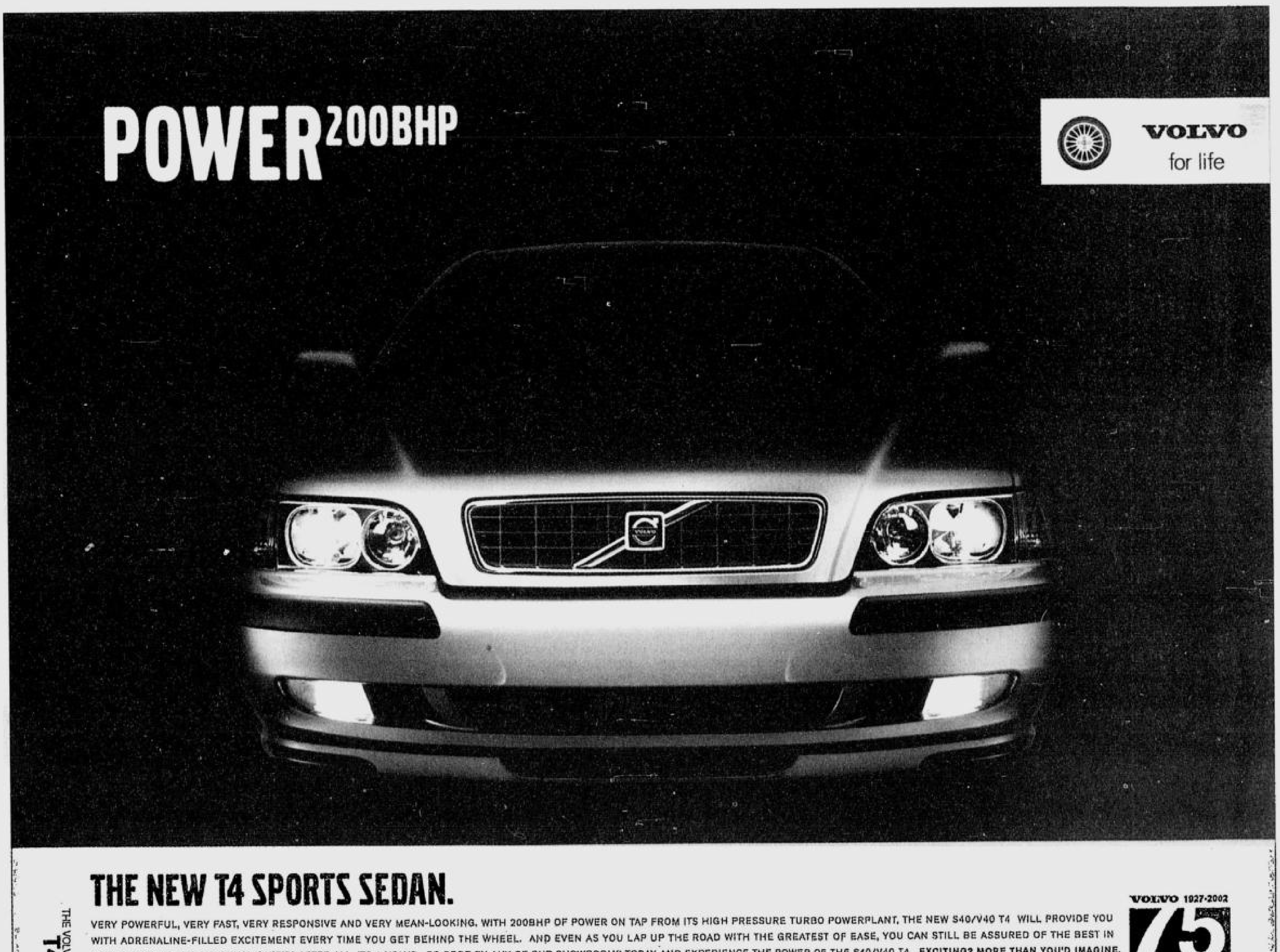
PNOC-EDC chair Sergio F. Apostol said in an interview that the company and its prospective partners were eyeing prospects in Palawan, Leyte and Mindoro.

"The Palawan and Leyte prospects are at sea while the one in Mindoro is inland," Apostol said. "But we won't know which of these would be explored first until we get a partner."

Aside from that, he added, all of PNOC-EDC's nine drilling rigs were currently engaged in various local and overseas projects.

"PNOC-EDC is embarking on an aggressive drilling program this year. It is an expert not only in geothermal development but also in oil and gas exploration," the company chief said.

PNOC/ B2



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Benpres says BayanTel debt restructuring talks on track

By Abigail L. Ho

SHAREHOLDER issues, including those involving JP Morgan Chase & Co. and Asian Infrastructure Fund, are unlikely to affect the restructuring of Lopez-owned Bayan Telecommunications Inc.'s around $477 million in debts.

In an interview, Angel Ong, chief finance officer of Lopez flagship firm Benpres Holdings Corp., said the decision of JP Morgan Chase and AIF to get out of the debt-saddled firm "would not have much impact" on BayanTel's debt-restructuring talks, as this had no direct effect on the telecom firm's operations.

"It's a shareholder issue," he said.

A BayanTel source added that the shares of JP Morgan Chase and AIF in the company were "too small" for their exit to have a direct impact on the company.

Benpres is expected to buy out at least $6.7 million worth of JP Morgan Chase and $45.4 million worth of AIF investments. in BayanTel.

The put-option provision for BayanTel lapsed in October last year.

Ong said Benpres lawyers were currently in talks with their counterparts in the two companies.

"We're now talking to them. Our lawyers will be taking a look at the documents," he said.

He explained that Benpres and the two firms still had to resolve some differences in the amount that Benpres had to honor under the put option.

In the case of AIF, it has claimed a higher number of shares and a higher price than the $45.4 million recognized by Benpres.

But Benpres, for its part, has recognized only up to $52 million worth of obligations under the put option for BayanTel.

Even while talks to resolve these shareholder issues were ongoing, Ong said discussions with BayanTel's creditors would still go on.

BayanTel chief finance officer Gary Olivar said in an earlier interview that a substantial term sheet for the debt restructuring would most likely be completed by the first half of this year.

Meetings with both unsecured and secured creditors would take place within the month, he added.

"We haven't been able to gather our secured and unsecured creditors in one place. We planned to do it but it didn't push through. Hopefully, we can all sit down for discussions in January," he said.

Trade officials step up trade promo drive in China

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

THE DEPARTMENT of Trade and Industry is stepping up its trade promotion campaign in China this year holding the first Philippine solo exhibition in Shanghai in March to help Philippine exporters penetrate the Mainland market.

Trade and Industry Secretary Manuel A. Roxas II said the exhibit would provide the country with a major opportunity to establish links with China and establish a foothold in its market.

Roxas said that the Philippines' strong export performance in China last year showed that the country's exporters have nothing to fear about China's entry into the World Trade Organization.

"China is both an opportunity and a threat to the country. The more we take advantage of our opportunities in China, the lesser it becomes a threat to us because we know we can compete with them," Roxas said.

He said there was a wide range of products that could potentially enjoy greater demand from the Chinese market because of lower prices brought about by lower tariffs that came as part of China's WTO membership. With 1.3 billion in population, China has been dubbed as the ultimate market and ultimate challenge for exporters.

The Shanghai exhibit will include fresh fruits (fresh mangoes, durian and coconut); garments; holiday decor; jewelry; food and beverage; marine products; carrageenan; furniture; building decoration materials; cosmetics; automotive parts; information-technology enabled services, and education services.

Roxas reported that Philippine exports to China nearly doubled to $1.2 billion this year from $614 million last year due to aggressive marketing efforts by Philippine exporters to find new market as their traditional markets—the United States, Japan and Europe—face a slowing economy.

Roxas said the strong export performance boosted the country's trade with the Mainland with a trade surplus of $200 million last year from a trade deficit of $400 million in 2001.

Manila Rep. Harry Angping, chair of the House committee on trade and industry, said the project was meant to give Philippine exporters a head-start to take advantage of the anticipated rise in public spending in China when it hosts the 2008 Olympic Games.

Rules on bad loans law out by Jan. 30

THE SECURITIES and Exchange Commission has said it will come up with the implementing rules and regulations of the "special-purpose vehicle bill" that President Macapagal-Arroyo is set to sign into law by Jan. 30.

As lead agency, the SEC will work with the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, Department of Finance and Bureau of Internal Revenue to draft the implementing rules.

"We should be ready with the rules, at the latest, on Jan. 30," SEC Chair Lilia Bautista said.

The proposed law provides banks and other financial institutions tax breaks and other incentives so they can sell their non-performing assets, particularly bad loans and acquired assets, through "special purpose asset vehicles" or "asset management companies."

Under the bill's provisions, a special purpose asset vehicle or an asset management company must have a minimum authorized capital stock of P500 million.

After these are incorporated, these corporations must submit to the SEC a plan outlining their investment policies, features and the amounts of investment unit instruments that they will issue, as well as credit enhancements, among others.

"They should register the IUIs because they are securities," Bautista said.

The bill exempts the following taxes: documentary stamp tax on the transfer of non-performing assets and assets subject to payment-in-kind arrangements; capital gains tax imposed on the transfer of lands and other capital assets; creditable withholding taxes on the transfer of land or buildings; value-added tax on the transfer of non-performing assets. *Elena R. Torrijos*

JODC SUPPORT PROGRAM

Feliciano Torres, MVPMAP president, conveys the gratitude of auto parts makers to JODC for the technical assistance program being extended to build up their competitiveness. Seiichi Hori, JODC program coordinator, receives the plaque given by MVPMAP during ceremonies held on Dec. 10.

Pay up, Japan inspector tells Piatco

THE JAPAN Air Consultants Inc. (Jaci) is asking the Philippine International Air Terminals Co. Inc. (Piatco) for payment of its fees as a quality assurance inspector (QAI) of the Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminal 3.

In a letter to Piatco president Cheng Yong dated Dec. 4, 2002, Jaci quality assurance manager Hideaki Iida said Piatco should proceed with the supplemental agreement to the quality assurance contract signed in November in order to make the appropriate payment for its services as QAI.

Iida said there were no outstanding issues to be settled that could have delayed the SA and implement the QAI's long overdue extension of its services.

Iida said that the validity of the QAI agreement should not be affected by recent developments that have put into question Piatco's concession agreement considering that the QAI has substantially performed its tasks.

Manila International Airport Authority general manager Edgardo C. Manda earlier reported that Naia 3 was not only far from being completed and ready for commercial operations but its contractor, Takenaka Corp., has suspended work in Naia 3 effective Dec. 3 due to non-payment of its fees.

Jaci also wrote to the MIAA to report that a considerable number of systems completion tests had either failed or had been inadequate requiring re-testing, and that there were still a number of unresolved construction issues that indicated that the building was far from complete. Piatco had intended to open the terminal by Dec. 15 this year. *Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.*

Cable TV monopoly seen emerging

ALTHOUGH discussions between Destiny Cable Inc. and Beyond Cable Holdings Ltd. for a possible consolidation are still ongoing and have resulted in nothing concrete, industry observers believe an eventual monopoly in the cable TV industry may emerge soon.

Officials of both Destiny and Beyond Cable have admitted that they are indeed engaged in talks on a possible consolidation of two of the country's largest cable operators.

SkyCable and Home Cable announced in 2001 their consolidation, giving rise to fears of a monopoly. With Destiny in the picture, however, these monopoly fears were somehow allayed.

But the possible consolidation of Destiny and Beyond Cable has given rise to speculations of another monopoly.

"We'll always be considering the public. We'll make sure that whatever action we make will not prejudice consumers," Beda Manalac, senior vice president of Destiny parent firm Solid Group Inc., said.

SEC issues new warnings against 'Ponzi' operator

By Elena R. Torrijos

THE SECURITIES and Exchange Commission has issued new warnings against Multinational Telecom Investors Corp., which leads a group of companies that securities regulators are investigating for investment fraud.

"Do not believe any statement from them," SEC compliance and enforcement department director Jose Tomas Syquia advised the public.

The SEC issued new warnings after print ads paid for by Multitel chair Rosario Baladjay appeared persuading Multitel's investors to stay on and even roll over their investments, as the SEC was supposedly set to legalize Multitel's operations.

Syquia disclosed that the SEC had even already cited Multitel in contempt for violating a cease-and-desist order against it.

Moreover, the SEC was holding proceedings to revoke Multitel's corporate license, he added.

He said Multitel's investors should no longer put any more money in Multitel.

"If they are foolish enough to roll over their investments, God help them," Syquia added.

The Multitel group of Baladjay, a former employee of Eastern Telecoms cooperative, is being accused of running a classic Ponzi scheme that follows the "rob-Peter-to-pay-Paul" principle.

Essentially, it involves getting money from new investors to pay off earlier investors all of whom are enticed by the ridiculously high interest rates offered.

With an estimated 800,000 investors that regulators guess had put in between P5 billion and P10 billion, Multitel's operations have become larger than a few of the country's commercial banks—and the source of unimaginable heartbreak.

By the accounts of its investors, Multitel and its clone, Multitel International Holdings Inc., and their conduits got investments from the public by offering high interest rates.

The group guaranteed a monthly interest of 4 percent for a minimum investment of P10,000 or a double-your-money rate in case the investor opted to avail of an 18-month lock-in investment scheme.

Baladjay and her associates have gone into hiding.

In its cease-and-desist order in September, the SEC said MIHI made its placement offer to the public through its supposed "marketing institutions," among them the Everflow Group of Companies, One-Heart Multi-Purpose Cooperative Inc. and Star Enterprise Multi-Purpose Cooperative Inc.

PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE

(As of Friday, December 27, 2002)

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BANKS					
Asiatrust Dev. Bank Inc.	4.9	4.9	4.9	4.9	1,000
Banco de Oro Univ. Bank	17.5	18.5	17.5	18.5	795,700
Bank of the Phil. Islands	34	34.5	33.5	33.5	450,600
China Banking Corp.	625	625	625	625	200
Citystate Savings Bank	15	15	15	15	2,000
Equitable PCI Bank Inc.	27	27.5	27	27	128,500
Metropolitan Bank & Trust	31.5	31.5	31	31.5	379,800
Phil. Bank of Comm. A	80	80	80	80	300
Philippine National Bank	23.75	23.75	23.5	23.5	12,200
Security Bank Corp.	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5	1,600,900
Union Bank of the Phil.	17.25	17.75	17.25	17.5	25,000
FINANCIAL SERVICE					
Filipino Fund Inc.	0.32	0.32	0.32	0.32	10,000
First Metro Invest. Corp.	225	230	225	230	140
Manulife Financial Corp.	1150	1150	1150	1150	210
PCI Leasing & Fin. Inc.	0.74	0.74	0.72	0.72	140,000
Sun Life Financial Serv.	900	900	900	900	1,070
COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL					
COMMUNICATION					
ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp.	16	16	16	16	10,800
Diversified Fin. Network	3.5	4	3.5	3.95	1,835,000
Digital Telecom Phils Inc.	0.4	0.41	0.4	0.4	2,010,000
Globe Telecom Inc.	445	447.5	445	447.5	91,850
Island Info And Tech Inc.	0.024	0.024	0.022	0.022	2,900,000
ISM Communications Corp.	0.013	0.015	0.013	0.015	1,500,000
Manila Bulletin Pub. Corp	3.6	3.9	3.6	3.85	281,000
Pilipino Tel. Corp.	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	40,000
Phil. Long Dis Tel Co.	270	272.5	270	270	100,370
Ivantage Corp.	0.26	0.28	0.26	0.28	250,000
Philweb Corp.	0.011	0.011	0.01	0.011	9,600,000
POWER & ENERGY					
Manila Electric Co. A	8.2	8.2	8.2	8.2	8,000
Manila Electric Co. B	9	9	8.8	8.8	1,197,000
Petron Corporation	1.54	1.56	1.54	1.56	2,336,000
Trans-Asia Oil and Energy	0.96	1	0.96	1	9,500,000
TRANSPORTATION SERVICES					
Asian Terminals Inc.	1.36	1.36	1.36	1.36	156,000
Int'l Container Term'l Sv	2.4	2.42	2.4	2.42	390,000
Lorenzo Shipping Corp.	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	10,000
Negros Navigation Co. Inc.	0.29	0.3	0.29	0.3	190,000
CONSTRUCTION & OTHER RELATED PRODUCTS					
Republic Glass Hldg. Corp	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.5	112,000
Union Cement Corp.	0.43	0.45	0.43	0.45	210,000
FOOD, BEVERAGES & TOBACCO					
Alaska Milk Corp.	2.1	2.2	2.1	2.2	25,000
Jollibee Foods Corp.	18	18.5	18	18.25	2,011,200
La Tondeña Distillers Inc.	34.5	35	34	35	187,400
San Miguel Corp. A	59	60	59	60	555,400
San Miguel Corp. B	64	66	64	66	585,000
HOLDING FIRMS					
Abacus Con Res & Hdg A	0.33	0.36	0.33	0.36	160,000
Ayala Corp.	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.3	624,000
Aboitiz Equity Ventures	2.3	2.3	2.26	2.26	110,000
Ajo.Net Holdings Inc.	0.165	0.165	0.165	0.165	20,000
Alcorn Gold Res. Corp.	0.005	0.0055	0.005	0.0055	3,000,000
Atn Holdings Inc.	2.22	2.24	2.22	2.24	14,000
Benpres Holdings Corp.	0.105	0.11	0.105	0.11	1,140,000
Crown Equities Inc.	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12	100,000
DMCI Holdings Inc.	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.14	250,000
Ever-Gotesco Resources	0.015	0.015	0.015	0.015	1,000,000
Filinvest Dev. Corp.	1.08	1.12	1.08	1.12	300,000
First Phil Hldgs Corp.	8.2	8.2	8	8.1	117,000
Ionics Inc.	0.96	0.97	0.96	0.96	1,140,000
J.G. Summit Holdings Inc.	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	50,000
Medco Holdings	0.042	0.042	0.042	0.042	100,000
Megaworld Corp.	0.56	0.58	0.56	0.58	640,000
Metro Pacific Corp.	0.16	0.165	0.16	0.16	740,000
Music Corp.	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	600,000
East Asia Power Res. Corp	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	600,000
Solid Group Inc.	0.21	0.21	0.21	0.21	140,000
Tanduay Holdings Inc.	3.45	3.5	3.45	3.5	20,000
Waterfront Phils. Inc.	0.23	0.25	0.23	0.25	1,200,000
MANUFACTURING, DISTRIBUTION & TRADING					
Euro-Med Lab. Phil. Inc.	4.85	4.9	4.85	4.9	7,000
Interphil Labs Inc. A	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.9	210,000
Interphil Labs Inc. B	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.9	555,000
Matsushita Elec Phil Corp.	9	9	9	9	1,000
Spi Technologies Inc.	11	11.75	11	11.75	175,200
HOTEL, RECREATION & OTHER SERVICE					
Belle Corp.	0.35	0.35	0.34	0.35	250,000
Grand Plaza Hotel Corp.	31.5	34	30.5	33	45,500
BONDS, PREFERRED & WARRANTS					
ABS-CBN Hldgs. Corp (Pdr)	16.25	16.25	16	16.25	147,100
Jollibee Warrants	17.75	18	17.75	18	3,900
OTHERS					
Centro Escolar University	8.4	9	6	9	644,000
PROPERTY					
Ayala Land Inc.	4.5	4.55	4.45	4.55	4,078,000
Cyber Bay Corp.	1100	0.11	0.11	0.11	200,000
Empire East Land Inc.	1100	0.115	0.11	0.115	1,840,000
Filinvest Land Inc.	8200	0.83	0.82	0.83	330,000
Highlands Prime Inc.	1.98	2	1.96	2	4,080,000
Fil-Estate Land Inc.	1300	0.14	0.12	0.12	660,000
SM Development Corp.	1	1.1	1	1.06	42,000
SM Prime Holdings Inc.	4.75	4.8	4.7	4.75	9,932,000
MINING					
Abra Mining & Industrial	0.0034	0.0034	0.0034	0.0034	15,000,000
Atlas Cons. Min & Dev't	1.02	1.2	1	1.2	135,000
Lepanto Cons Mng. Co. A	0.195	0.195	0.195	0.195	500,000
Lepanto Cons. Mng. Co B	0.205	0.21	0.205	0.21	1,100,000
Omico Corp.	0.002	0.0024	0.002	0.0024	30,000,000
OIL					
Imperial Res.	0.011	0.011	0.011	0.011	1,000,000
Interport Res. B	0.0014	0.0014	0.0014	0.0014	2,000,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. A	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	1,000,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. B	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	29,000,000
Sinophil Corp.	0.022	0.022	0.022	0.022	800,000

CURRENCIES

Dec. 27, 2002 Country	Unit	Euro Equivalent	Foreign currency in US$	Foreign currency in Peso
United States	Dollar	0.963391	1.000000	53.096000
Japan	Yen	0.008034	0.008339	0.442800
United Kingdom	Pound	1.542486	1.601100	85.012000
Hongkong	Dollar	0.123536	0.128230	6.808500
Switzerland	Franc	0.687008	0.713114	37.863500
Canada	Dollar	0.618431	0.641931	34.084000
Singapore	Dollar	0.554215	0.575275	30.544800
Australia	Dollar	0.541718	0.562303	29.856000
Bahrain	Dinar*	2.555685	2.652801	140.853100
Saudi Arabia	Rial	0.256905	0.266667	14.159000
Brunei	Dollar	0.552625	0.573625	30.457200
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.000109	0.000113	0.006000
Thailand	Baht	0.022405	0.023256	1.234800
UAE	Dirham	0.262319	0.272287	14.457400
Euro	Euro	1.000000	1.038000	55.113600
ArgentinaPeso	0.283351	0.294118	15.616500	
Brazil	REAL	0.272375	0.282725	15.011600
Denmark	Kroner	0.134649	0.139766	7.421000
India	Rupee	0.020092	0.020855	1.107300
Malaysia	Ringgit	0.253558	0.263193	13.974500
Mexico	New Peso	0.093907	0.097475	5.175500
New Zealand	Dollar	0.498160	0.517090	27.455400
Norway	Kroner	0.137256	0.142472	7.564700
Pakistan	Rupee	0.016596	0.017227	0.914700
South Africa	Rand	0.109228	0.113379	6.020000
Korea	Won	0.000803	0.000833	0.044200
Sweden	Kroner	0.109606	0.113771	6.040800
Syria	Pound	0.018706	0.019417	1.031000
Taiwan	Nt Dollar	0.027748	0.028802	1.529300
Venezuela	Bolivar	0.000690	0.000716	0.038000

PNOC unit taps . . .

From page B1

The state firm is the country's largest developer of geothermal projects.

It also discovered early in 2002 the Victoria gas reserve in Tarlac. The gas find was, however, contaminated with water and had to be abandoned.

In a related development, PNOC-EDC announced earlier this month that it was eyeing an oil and gas drilling project in Australia.

The firm said that South Australia Northern Territory Oil Search Ltd. (Santos Ltd.) had invited it to submit a proposal for a three-year oil and gas drilling contract upon the recommendation of Lihir Management Corp. (LMC) of Papua New Guinea.

PNOC-EDC is serving a third contract with LMC for the drilling of geothermal wells. It started work in 1999 in Lihir Island, New Ireland province and has since drilled 22 wells.

The firm is working on a 23rd well under its third contract with LMC for developing and maintaining geothermal wells.

In 2001, PNOC-EDC reported that its drilling unit posted P222.6 million in revenues mainly from overseas contracts companies. This was 65 percent more than the P134.8-million revenues in 2000.

Company officials said that the firm was set to strengthen its hold in the drilling industry and that is has formed a marketing team to identify potential projects.

Internet a way of life for many Americans; online use rises

WASHINGTON—Despite the recent travails of many information technology sector businesses, Americans' love affair with the Internet is stronger than ever, a new study confirms.

"The Internet has become a mainstream information tool," the report released Sunday by the Pew Research Center said.

"Its popularity and dependability have raised all Americans' expectations about the information and services available online."

The Pew study found that more than 60 percent of Americans who now have Internet access have increasingly high expectations of the information they can find online.

The report said two-thirds of Americans now expect to be able to find information on health care, government services, news and commerce on the Internet.

"Internet users are more likely than non-users to have high expectations of what will be available online, and yet even 40 percent of people who are not Internet users say they expect the Web to have information and services in these essential online arenas," the report added.

About 80 percent of Internet users say they expect the Internet to have information on a variety of areas such as health care, government agencies, news and shopping.

"These high expectations are driven by experience," the report said. "Of Internet users who have sought information from the Web on these topics, about three-fourths have had positive experiences in finding what they need.

The report noted that around 40 percent of Americans have now been online for more than three years, suggesting that use of the Internet has become a way of life.

"For many of these Internet users, the Net is the first place to which they will turn next time they need information about a government service or health care." *AFP*

Eastern Europeans go on yearend shopping binge

PRAGUE—Eastern Europeans, enjoying rising purchasing power, stormed the region's recently built shopping malls in record numbers ahead of the holiday season, snapping up consumer goods, not long ago out of their reach.

Business leaders across the region reported an unprecedented holiday season sales surge which economists attribute to the region's rising purchasing power and firmer consumer confidence with the EU enlargement on the horizon.

"We noticed a sharp increase (in sales) from December 2001," said Dorota Patejko, spokesperson for French supermarket chain Auchan, adding: "Traditionally, December sales volumes are 10 times greater than the monthly average."

In the Czech Republic, big retailers reported a similar story. Swedish furniture retailer Ikea, which has three stores in the country, expects a 7-percent increase in December sales from the same month in 2001 while British supermarket giant Tesco and its French rival Carrefour also noticed particularly strong sales without giving any figures.

In Hungary, supermarkets and shopping malls are also rubbing their hands with satisfaction with December sales. At the West End City Center, one of the biggest malls in Budapest, customers spent 18 percent more than last year in the run up to the Christmas holiday, director Peter Posch said.

Economists said the spending spree was the result of Eastern Europeans feeling richer, which was sustaining consumer confidence amid the global economic downturn.

"Despite high unemployment, households are optimistic," said Kamil Janacek, chief economist at Komercni Banka in Prague. "They are thinking their situation is going to improve, it's the contrary to the situation in Germany," he said.

However, improving purchasing power is a greater factor for the new-found fondness for holiday shopping binges than the future enlargement of the European Union.

The eastern European countries of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, plus Malta and Cyprus, have been invited to join the European Union in 2004.

In the Czech Republic the average salary rose 7.4 percent in the third quarter of 2002 from the same quarter in 2001. In Hungary, take-home pay in November rose 12.5 percent from the same month in 2001 thanks largely to a 50-percent pay rise for civil servants.

Purchasing power has also been kept strong by relatively low inflation, which 10 years ago reached 70 percent per year in the region.

Meanwhile, the region's currencies have strengthened ahead of EU enlargement, which has made it cheaper for Eastern Europeans to buy imports, especially electricity.

With prices stable and currencies firm, the region's central banks have been able to slash interest rates, lowering the cost of borrowing.

Consumer credit has also become easier to get, further boosting consumer spending.

"These loans are up 70 percent this year at Komercni Bank," Janacek said.

Consumer credit is particularly popular with the region's young, contrary to older generations which were not exposed to such financial facilities under communism.

Such loans are used, in particular, to buy consumer electronics *AFP*

AN ELDERLY woman walks past an advertisement highlighting the digital technology currently fashionable in Beijing. China's rapid adoption of the latest computer and telecom technologies is widening the divide between those who have access to and can afford these technologies and those who cannot. AP

China seen exporting 10M tons of corn in 2003

SHANGHAI—China is expected to export about 10 million tonnes of corn this year, maintaining this year's strong levels, an official at one of the country's two authorized corn exporters said on Monday.

"China exports have been quite strong and next year's exports should be around 10 million tonnes," said the official from Jilin Grain Group (JGG), based in the northeastern province of Jilin.

"Whether there is a significant rise depends on how market prices do and what China's corn export policy is for next year," he said. *Reuters*

Semiconductor sales up 1.3% to $12.7B

GLOBAL semiconductor sales rose 1.3 percent to $12.68 billion in November from $12.51 billion in October, according to figures published on Monday by the chip industry's main research group.

Growth decelerated from October, when monthly growth was up 1.8 percent on the previous month, The World Semiconductor Trade Statistics group said.

Chip sales traditionally accelerate in the run-up to the end-of-year holidays on the back of strong demand by electronics manufacturers for goods.

This year, however, demand from businesses and consumers for the two categories have remained slack.

Compared with the same month of November a year earlier, global sales grew 19.6 percent, slightly slower than the 19.9-percent annual growth in October. Comparisons with the same months last year look favorable, but only because the semiconductor industry then experienced its worst period ever. *Reuters*

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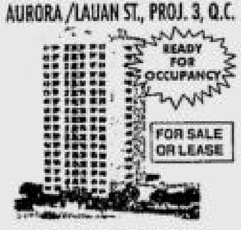

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FEMALE

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PUBLIC NOTICES

AUCTION SALE

JAC FILIPINAS PAWNSHOP INC. 100 C. Palanca St. Quiapo, Manila will sell all unredeemed pledges for the months of JUNE & JULY 2002 on Jan. 13, 2003 at 8:30am J. Lanuza Auctioneer

LEGAL NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that the estate of the Late Evangelina D. Llaguno has been settled by her Heirs as per Doc. No. 37, Page, 7, Book No. 22, Series of 2002 by Notary Public Atty. Amado E. Villafuerte of Quezon City PTR No. A-1960514/ 1-2-2001, Quezon City. (PDI- Dec. 19, 26, 2002 & Jan. 2, 2003)

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CODE	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION	MINIMUM BID
REAL ESTATE			
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AMD-MR-1	Tadeo St., Poblacion, Bustos	2,999 m^2 residential/commercial lot (TCT No. T-118053 with residential bldg. and imprvmts.	P 10,875,000.00
AMD-JB-2	Poblacion, Bustos	1,015.50 m^2 residential lot (TCT No. T-132040) with 2-door apartment and imprvmts.	P 2,260,900.00
AMD-MR-3	Along Kansas St., Ciudad Grande North Subd., Phase II, Bos. Banga & Lawa, Meycauayan	120 m^2 vacant residential lot (TCT No. T-357145(M)	P 312,000.00
AMD-MR-4	-do-	120 m^2 vacant residential lot (TCT No. T-357146(M)	P 312,000.00
DAVAO			
AMD-ED-5a to 5g	Kristina Homes Subd., Lizada, Toril, Davao City	7 individually titled residential lots (110 m^2 each) TCT Nos. T-347748 to 347750, 347752 to 347755) each with 1-storey residential house	P 175,600.00 (per lot)
QUEZON			
AMD-MR-6	Morong, Sariaya	50,299 m^2 interior agricultural lot (TCT No. T-392733 (T-241018)	P 1,257,500.00
RIZAL			
CRM-AS-1	37 L. Santos St., Brgy. San Juan, Cainta	2 parcels of residential lot (total area of 576m^2) (TCT Nos. 655508 & 655509) with 1-storey residential bldg. and imprvts.	P 2,368,600.00
CHATTELS (sale on "as-is, where-is" basis)			
AMD-MR-8a to 8u	La Campana Cmpd., EDSA, Balintawak, Quezon City	21 units various machinery and equipment for steel manufacturing	P 2,300.00 to 1,782,500.00
AMD-MR-9a to 9f	-do-	6 units various machinery and equipment for plastic product manufacturing	P 600.00 to 23,600.00
AMD-MR-6a to 6c	De Guzman-Reyes Cmpd., Bo. Mamala, Sariaya, Quezon	1 set feedmilling equipment 1 unit AC generating set, diesel drive 3 units molasses storage tank	P 203,100.00 P 164,500.00 P 52,800.00
AMD-ED-10	DBP Depot, Doña Severina Subd., Parañaque City	1 lot sewing machines and equipment (15 units)	P 39,500.00
AMD-ED-11	-do-	2 units high speed sewing machines	P 36,100.00

Forms for negotiated offers may be obtained from AMD-Acquired Asset.

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*ANYONE KNOWING THE WHEREABOUTS OF **"ATE PRECY"** WHO OWNED AND MANAGED THE BIRTHSTONE CLUB ON McARTHUR HIGHWAY IN ANGELES CITY DURING 1979-1980, OR MY SON, RAYMUNDO RAMOS WHO WAS LIVING WITH HER AT THE TIME, PLEASE CONTACT ME. E-MAIL IS: snidely731@aol.com, mailing address is Nenita B. Ramos 2401 Sombrero Drive Colorado Springs, Colorado 80910-1135 USA, phone is (719) 328-0420. I WOULD APPRECIATE THE RESPONSE OF ANYONE WHO CAN PROVIDE VALID INFORMATION AS TO THE LOCATION, ADDRESS(ES), PHONE NUMBERS OR E-MAIL ADDRESSES OF HER OR MY SON.*

THANK YOU, NENITA B. RAMOS

INQUIRER TRIVIA

By BONG BARRAMEDA

Horse doze

Q. Can horses really sleep while standing?

A. Horses have the ability to sleep while standing. Their legs are provided with muscular mechanisms which cause them to lock, as it were, and permit the animals to rest somewhat as if they standing on stilts. When a standing horse is unconscious there is no direct brain control over the muscles essential to the maintenance of an erect posture. The muscles in the legs, back and chest are controlled by the reflex actions of the spinal cord. In a similar manner a bird sleeping on swaying limb maintains a reflex balance while its consciousness is in abeyance. Horses sleeping while standing occassionally, though rarely, fall down. More often certain muscles in the forelegs relax suddenly and the horse knuckles over on the fetlocks (tufts of hair on the back of the horse's legs) and then immediately catches itself.

For the Record. Horses sometimes go on for months without lying down. It is astonishing how little sleep they require. When horses lie down to sleep their eyes usually remain open or partly open, and they sleep so lightly that they are awakened by the faintest sound. They seldom lie long in the same position because their great weight cramps their muscles and prevents the under lung from functioning.

Ooops! It isn't the brain feeling pain when you have a headache. The brain cannot feel pain – it has no pain receptors. The pain you feel in your head is caused by receptors in structures outside the brain, most commonly blood vessles or the covering of the brain (dura mater).

WORD WATCH

Kabesa : from the Spanish *cabeza*, 'head.'

PDI – January 2, 2003

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RAQUEL ESPINO PICAZO

Has gone in the Grace of our Lord
on December 30, 2002

Her devoted children **Rolly** (†) and **Medy, Didi** and **Carding Garcia, Jory** and **Kathy** (†), **Ruth, Deane** and **Frank Ramoso, Ramon** and **Cynthia, Joy** (†) and **Toti Juan**; grandchildren, great grandchildren, relatives and friends request those whose lives she had once touched to pray for her peaceful rest in the company of her beloved Creator.

Cremation will be on January 2, 2003 at 9:00 A.M.

Her remains will be at Sta. Maria Della Strada Parish Church, Katipunan Ave., Loyola Heights, Quezon City from January 2, afternoon, through January 5.

Funeral Mass will be held on January 5, 2003 at 10:00 A.M.

"There was never a woman like her. She was gentle as a dove and brave as a lioness...
The memory of my mother and her teaching were, after all, the only capital I had to start life with,
and on that capital I have made my way."

–Andrew Jackson

On the Tenth Death Anniversary of

ATTY. FELIPE GONZAGA SANTOS

(FORMER PRESIDENT OF STA. LUCIA REALTY & DEV., INC.)

who passed away on the 2nd of January 1993.

We, his family would like to request all those whose lives he had touched and helped, and all those who have, in one way or another, been a part of his life, to please pray for the eternal repose of his soul.

Holy Masses will be offered at the following churches on January 2, 2003:

Sto. Tomas de Villanueva Parish Church, *Santolan*........ 6 AM
Our Lady of Abandoned Church, *Marikina* .... 6 PM
Christ the King Parish Church, *Greenmeadows* .... 6 PM
Our Lady of EDSA Shrine.. 6 PM

"My greatest ambition is to be with JESUS in HEAVEN."

JULIA BEATRIZ R. REYES

Paref-Rosehill School

Born on May 27, 1993 and peacefully joined her Creator on December 29, 2002 at the age of 9.

Her bereaved family **Benjie, Marivic, Miguel, Gabe** and **Angela** request the pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of her soul.

Her remains lie in state at Mt. Carmel Church, New Manila, Quezon City.

Interment will be at Loyola Memorial Park, Marikina on January 3, 2003 after the 1:00 p.m. Mass at the Mt. Carmel Church.

CONRADO M. PADILLA

of Calapan, Oriental Mindoro
and Kawit, Cavite

His remains will be laid to rest tomorrow, January 3, 2003 at the Paradise Memorial Park at Tabon, Kawit, Cavite after the 2:00 p.m. Mass at the St. Mary Magdalene Church, Kawit, Cavite.

His body lies in state at his residence at #34 Gahak, Kawit, Cavite.

"...absent with the body to be present with the Lord." Matthew 10:39

"Whoever serves Me must follow Me; and where I am,
My servant also will be." John: 12:26

NARCISO G. MICHELENA

August 4, 1932 – December 30, 2002
Peacefully joined his Creator at the age of 70.

He is survived by his beloved wife **NENA** and loving sons **TOOTS** and **MEL**.

His siblings **Maning** (†), **Peping, Ton, Rose** and **Jun**, their families and friends request the pious reader to pray for the eternal repose of his soul.

His body lies in state at the family residence in Irosin, Sorsogon.

Interment will be on Tuesday, January 7, 2003 at 3 p.m. at the Irosin Catholic Cemetery.

CONSOLACION "CONSOLING" SARTE AGUILAR

Peacefully joined her Creator and her husband
on the 30th of December 2002
at the age of 89.

Her living family, children, children-in-law, grandchildren, relatives and friends request the readers to pray for the eternal repose of her soul.

Her remains lie in state at the Holy Trinity Memorial Chapels at Dr. A. Santos Ave., Sucat, Parañaque City.

Cremation will be on the 4th of January 2003 at the Manila Memorial Park Crematory after the celebration of the 9:30 a.m. Holy Mass at the Holy Trinity Memorial Chapels.

Lourdes San Diego Bagabaldo

Passed away in the Grace of our Lord
on December 29, 2002 at the age of 65.

Her husband **Tony**; children **Arnold** and **Cindy, Mandy** and **Pam**; grandchildren **Arisa, Paul** and **Vince**; brothers and sisters, other relatives and friends request the readers to join them in praying for her eternal happiness in heaven.

Her body lies in state at the Arlington Memorial Chapels. Interment will be today, January 2, 2003, 3:00 p.m. at Loyola Memorial Park, Parañaque.

Engr. RODOLFO L. MAGTURO

of Boac Marinduque

Passed away in the Grace of our Lord on Dec. 29, 2002 at the age of 82 at Los Angeles, Ca., USA.

His bereaved wife, **Lourdes**; children **Nonnette & Zarie, Rudy & Vicky, Ramon & Sylvia** and grandchildren, brothers, sisters, **Gracia, Ester, Gil & Charing, Edgardo, Renato & Thelma & Cleofe** request your prayers for the eternal repose of his soul.

His remains will be cremated and will be brought to the Philippines, first week of February 2003.

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Metrobank introduces innovations in Internet banking

METROBANK, the country's largest bank, recently launched Metrobankdirect Corporate, the more comprehensive, easy-to-use Internet banking facility in the market today.

metrobankdirect Corporate includes a wide array of innovative banking and security features that puts corporate leaders on top of their company's bank accounts anytime, anywhere at the click of a mouse.

Innovative features such as Account Sweep, Realtime Debit, and Auto Credit make handling corporate payables, receivables, and liquidity a lot easier and less time-consuming.

The Account Sweep facility allows finance officers to consolidate their company's accounts maintained in several branches without going through the usual tedious transactions. They can also transfer funds from their main account to their other accounts maintained in several branches right where they may be at the moment. Through Account Sweep, finance officers simply have to define target accounts, amounts, and schedules of transfer or collection and the system does the job automatically. What's more is they only have to do this once and they are free to attend to other business matters.

Realtime Debit is especially advantageous for companies who want to facilitate payment collection from their buyers who have Metrobank accounts. Collection of payments is easy, guaranteed and secure. On the other hand, their buyers will enjoy the convenience of not having to actually bring the cash, issue checks, or order manager's checks. They can just settle their payments online.

metrobankdirect Corporate also provides realtime account and loan information which managers can view, print or download. Other features include Auto Debit, Check Warehousing, Bills Collect, and other transactions such as deposit rates inquiry and foreign exchange rates and conversion.

metrobankdirect Corporate is designed with a built-in Approval Workflow facility and is certified by Verisign, one of the world's leading website certificate authorities. It is enabled with 128-bit encryption and is protected with firewalls and a built-in intrusion/virus detection system.

For more information, visit any Metrobank branch nearest you or call its E-banking division at 898-8973, 898-8976 or 898-8839, or take the online tour at www.metrobank.com.ph.

SEC DIRECTOR MEETS NEW BERKLEY PREXY

Berkley officials recently paid a courtesy call to Securities and Exchange Commission director for non-traditional securities and instruments lawyer Emilio B. Aquino. The meeting was arranged to formally introduce Luie C. Dy Buncio (2nd from left) as newly appointed president for the multinational's Philippine operations, which includes Berkley International Life, Berkley International Plans and Family First Inc. Dy Buncio was joined by Fernando C. Urquiza, president of Berkley International LLC and Felipe Diego, chair of Berkley International Philippines Inc. They briefed Aquino and his assistant directors about the pre-need plan company's expansion plans in the country. Shown are (from left) Urquiza, Dy Buncio, Aquino, assistant directors Noni Ambat and Merle Pascual, and Diego.

DESIGNER WINS INT'L AWARD

Maja Olivares-Co of Sonia Santiago Olivares and Associates (SSOA) won with Philips Lighting an Award of Merit from the International Illumination Design Awards (IIDA), a prestigious American-based award-giving body that recognizes outstanding achievements in lighting design. The IIDA cited Olivares-Co and Philips for their work in the cosmetics store Essences located at Rustan's for its highly illuminated and cleanly lined look using Philips' Ceramic Single Ended Metal Halide Reflector, or CDMR, enabling the store to exude a calm atmosphere in a boutique. Shown with Co are Philips projects channel lighting division manager Jose Ricardo C. Casas (left) and Philips lighting division general manager Mario G. Hernandez. SSOA has been in the interior design business for the last 36 years.

Filipino marketing executives hurdle CPM exams

FIVE Filipino marketing executives have passed the qualifying examinations for Certified Professional Marketer (Asia-Pacific) given by the Asia Pacific Marketing Federation, it was announced recently by Ma. Victoria E. Añonuevo, president of the Philippine Marketing Association and vice president for corporate business group of Ayala Land Inc.

The successful examinees are Donald Patrick Lim, Jose Manuel R. Oyson III, Ludwig J. Pascual, Gerardo P. Siquijor and Rafael P. Villanueva Jr.

Lim is the classifieds division head and marketing services manager of the Philippine Daily Inquirer. He has a BS in management degree from Ateneo de Manila University and an MBA from Murdoch University, Australia.

Oyson is the general manager of Fashion Direct Inc. in Cebu City. He obtained his BA political science degree cum laude and law degree from UP-Diliman. He also has an MBA from AIM.

Pascual is the vice president for marketing of Blast Asia Pte. Ltd. He is a metallurgical engineering graduate of Mapua Institute of Technology and a holder of an EMBA from AIM.

Siquijor is the first Asian to assume the post of regional brand manager for the over-the-counter business of Bayer, the German pharmaceutical firm. Now posted in Singapore, Siquijor obtained his BS in management degree from Ateneo de Manila and took MBA studies at DLSU-Manila.

Villanueva is the president of Harbor Town Management Corp. in Iloilo City. He is a BS business economics graduate of UP and obtained his MBA from the University of Virginia.

CPM (Asia Pacific) is the formal endorsement of professional status for marketing executives who have already attained a competent level of marketing in the Asia Pacific region. The exams are given twice a year by APMF through the PMA.

The next CPM qualifying examinations will be held in Manila in March 2003. For details, call professor Rene Esguerra, chair, PMA-CPM Career Development Program, at 892-3144, fax 892-3261, or e-mail pma@philonline.com.

MARKETING GURU LECTURES

Dr. Ned Roberto, a professor at the Asian Institute of Management (AIM) and internationally known author and social marketing expert, conducted a seminar for mutual funds sales people during the Mutual Funds Consciousness Week held recently. His talk centered on 'A New Look at Market Segmentation," wherein he highlighted the use of a new tool to determine the right audience for mutual funds. Shown is Artemio A. Tanchoco Jr., chair of Icap, handing Robertoa plaque as a token of Icap's appreciation and gratitude.

CHINA CERAMIC PRODUCTS EXPO

The China Jingdezhen Ceramics Product Expo was recently held at Park N' Ride beside the Mehan Garden and Manila City Hall. Behind the successful holding of the expo was noted Chinese-Filipino trader Danilo Dy, who opened the trade exhibit with Immigration Commissioner Andrea Domingo as special guest together with businessmen Robert Liang, president of Kayal International, Vic and Babes Javier of Park N' Ride Inc., and Gerry Dy, president of the Meycauayan Construction Enterprise. 40 leading producers led by officials Zau Fa Bao and Liao Qing Hua, representing China's capital for fine porcelain production Jingdezhen, Jiangchesia Province, participated in the trade fair held from Nov. 15 to 22. Over 10,000 select porcelain masterpieces were featured.

AGFA
Agfa
vista

PSA SPONSOR

Philippine Sportwriters Association president Roberto D. Cuevas, Photokina Marketing Corp. executive vice president George Chua, and Agfa division manager Rafaelito Casyao sign the sponsorship contracts for the PSA annual awards night on Jan. 10 at the Holiday Inn Manila. Agfa Vista is the official film and major sponsor of the PSA awards night.

'80S MUSIC LIVES ON AT DISH

The music of the '80s was hotter than ever this Holiday season at Dish. Bea Jacinto, Luccia Jacinto, EJ Litton, Jose Mari and Mary Ann Chan, Anna and Jo Chan, Ramon 'RJ' and Fannie Jacinto were among the party people grooving to the greatest hits of the '80s performed best by the Rage Band Dec. 21. "80s Night' at Dish is held every Saturday and is brought to you by RJ100 and Dish. For reservations, call 898-1771 or 898-1824.

Capri wins MOST account

CAMPAIGNS Advocacy & PR Inc. (Capri), the social marketing arm of Campaigns & Grey recently bagged the multimillion advertising and PR MOST account. Capri won in the bidding over Basic Advertising, O&M, and Gallardo & Associates.

MOST is the micronutrient program of USAid that aims to lessen the incidence of micronutrient (vitamin A, iron and iodine) deficiency around the world through food fortification. The food fortification program, which is more popularly known in the Philippines as Sangkap Pinoy, seeks to improve the micronutrient status of children and women. According to MOST officials, "micronutrient deficiency adversely affects the health and economic and social development of individuals, communities, and nations."

Capri will launch a massive and integrated public education and advocacy campaign to help reduce the incidence of micronutrient deficiency in the country. Aside from the consumers, the campaign will likewise target food producers, manufacturers and retailers, and local government units. The board of evaluators that selected the agency included representatives from DOH, BFAD, HKL, and MOST-USAid.

Product FILES

Instant home-made 'palabok'

EVERYONE'S favorite merienda fare can be prepared at home without the attendant fuss in creating the sauce. Mama Sita's Oriental Gravy Mix eliminates the tiresome task of extracting juice from countless shrimps and mixing it with other ingredients to produce the concoction.

Just dissolve the packet's contents in a measure of water or soup stock, stir with other ingredients, then pour over cooked white noodles, and presto—palabok in an instant.

Mama Sita's
Oriental Gravy Mix
Palabok
NET WT 2 OZ

Mama Sita's Oriental Gravy Mix can also be used to enrich seafood stews, fried rice, soups and chowders, and as a flavor base for ukoy (shrimp and vegetable fritters).

Available in 57-gram pouches, Mama Sita's Oriental Gravy Mix carries with it a heritage of cooking excellence that lives on in every Mama Sita's product. Manufactured by Marigold Commodities Corp., a Filipino company owned by a family of cooks and food lovers, Mama Sita's mixes and sauces are all-natural and preservative-free.

Small but tough road trekker

By Charles E. Buban

IN THE UNITED States there is a hot debate over requiring sport-utility vehicles and other light trucks to achieve higher rates of fuel efficiency.

Who can blame the Americans? With gasoline price soaring and oil supply in trouble (because of impending war in Iraq and civil unrest in oil-rich Venezuela), a gas-guzzling SUV will surely be a primary target of concern.

The proliferation of SUVs—now over 20 million in the US and are on their way to taking over the world's roads—has created problems for those who want SUV's riding experience yet worried about their gasoline expenses.

Then came a new type of SUV that won't let you pass out in front of the gas pump yet deliver the needed power when situation requires for it.

Gamble paid off

The arrival of the Jimny was something of a gamble for its Japanese maker Suzuki. With interior space fit only for four passengers, it seeks the younger segment of buyers who are adventurous yet conscious of the price tag.

At P599,000 for the JLX model and P549,000 for the JX (both manual transmission), the Jimny is surely appealing.

Fuel consumption is commendable as its diminutive 1.3L, 16-valve twin cam all-aluminum power plant consumes only an average of 7.8 liters per 100 kilometers or 9.5L/100 km (city driving) and 6.8L/100 km (highway).

A 40L fuel tank means the Jimny needs to refuel every 430 km or so, and it operates on unleaded.

With gross vehicle weight of 1,120 kg, the Jimny is classified as an all-around compact vehicle, which is just half to one-third the weight of most SUVs we drive today.

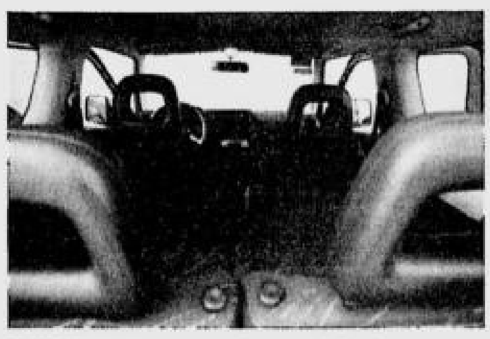
Worries unfounded

So when we took the Jimny for a spin, we were a bit apprehensive as to how the vehicle with a short wheelbase and high center of gravity is going to perform on the north expressway.

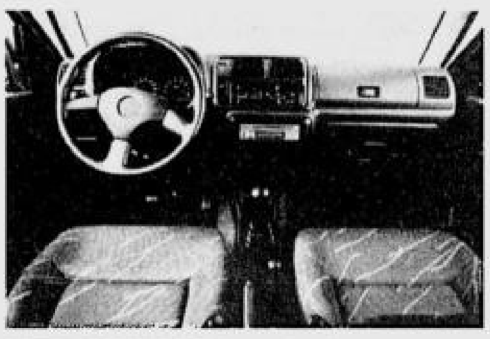
Our worries were unfounded as we didn't disappear off into the horizon while going side by side with massive provincial buses.

A FEW more improvements inside can really make the Jimny a fashionable 4WD vehicle.

THE JIMNY fares well as a light SUV.



THE JIMNY'S interior is surprisingly spacious.



THE DASHBOARD is very basic.

While never designed to be an overtaking monster, the Jimny was willing to be worked hard, producing a steady pace under 4,000 rpm at highway speed.

Jimny's good ground clearance provided comfort on hitting sudden bumps, but this SUV is more of a city runabout than a true bush basher or sand buggy. Jimny's ride quality is just on the average, characterized by bump-thump from the rear suspension, scanty bump absorption and a jiggly feel.

Roomy for four

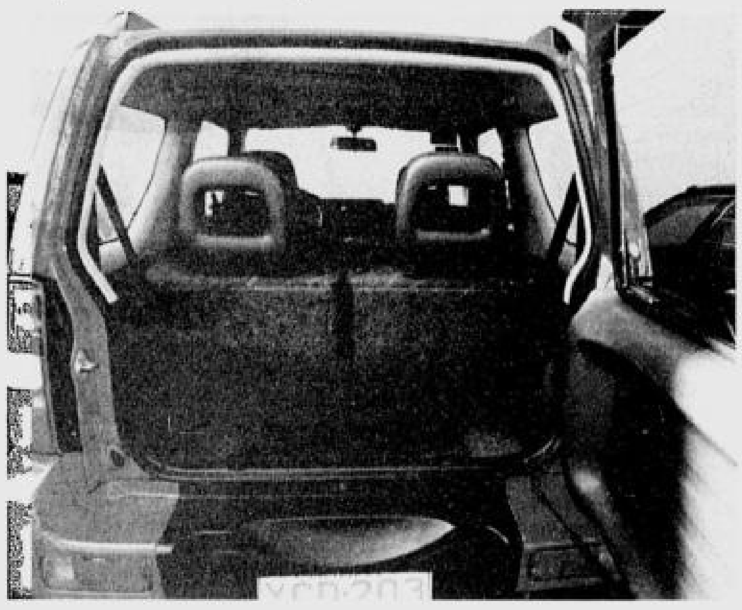
For such a compact SUV, the Jimny has a surprising amount of room. Leg room is restricted but the head and shoulder room allows the four passengers to travel in relative comfort.

Despite the average pickings in terms of equipment, the Jimny represents fair value for money in the light four-wheel-drive segment. It comes with a power front windows and mirrors, central locking, power steering, height-adjustable front belts, headrests, roof racks, 50/50 folding rear seat, a CD player and fairly powerful air-conditioning unit.

The glovebox and storage space also seem adequate, although the door pockets are tiny and narrow. And don't expect enough luggage space if you intend to tag along three more friends.

It should be remembered that for those who want more safety, airbags and ABS are optional. Owners can also opt to change the wheels into alloy ones as it will look good for the younger drivers.

In Britain and Australia, the Jimny may be something of a cult car or status symbol among young motorists, and such trend is very much possible here. Insofar as off-road vehicles are concerned, the Jimny offers an outstanding and unbeatable value for money.



THE COMPARTMENT can be maximized by folding the two rear

PHOTOS BY CHITO VECINA AND NEIL AGONOY

NEW MERCEDES-BENZ E-CLASS

Perfect blend of technical intelligence and latest design

THE NEW Mercedes-Benz E-Class has more than a scintillating shape going for it. By all indications, it is a technically sophisticated automobile which has been meticulously reengineered and improved with the future firmly in mind. Its unique vehicle concept rests on a perfect blend of technical intelligence and charismatic, up-to-date design.

Numerous innovations, like the intelligent technical solutions and enhanced components from the intelligent and lightweight yet extremely robust and safe construction, powerful engines, attractive transmission variants, to the chassis and braking systems, have been incorporated in the new E-Class, much to the pleasure of today's car owners and users.

Technical highlights

The technical highlights of the modern-day Mercedes-Benz E-Class include an extremely rigid high-strength passenger cell; a more solidly designed bodyshell; low-pollutant production and recycling concept; underfloor paneling made entirely of plastic; long-life corrosion protection; easy reparability; and no extra weight despite all the substantially enhanced equipment level.

Under the bonnet, one will find technology designed to make every road a driving pleasure. The E-Class is powered by a choice of three powerful engines—two six-cylinder models for the E240 and E320 models, and one 8-cylinder model for the E500. The spark ignition powerplants are substantially uprated versions of those installed in the predecessor series.

MERCEDES-Benz E-class

Moreover, the exhaust systems for the new E-Class models with gasoline engines are made entirely of stainless steel, and thoroughly improved to reduce emission and ensure longer service life. All gasoline-engine versions of the new E-Class are equipped with the adaptive accelerator as standard.

Also contributing to the utmost driving comfort and dynamics are a newly designed 4-link front suspension for more precise wheel location and minimum road roar and tire vibration; rack-and-pinion power steering as standard; speed-sensitive power steering as optional feature; multilink independent rear suspension offering unsurpassed wheel location quality; improved rear axle geometry; and reduced weight.

Mercedes Benz has set the benchmark in braking systems with its Sensotronic brake control, the world's first electrohydraulic braking system to be fitted as standard in a mass-produced vehicle, thereby adding functional value and customer benefit. Combined with the electronic stability program, it ensures maximum handling, safety and help in emergency situations.

Visit the Commercial Motors Corp. showroom for a test drive and experience a whole new dimension in driving convenience.

RPN
AUTO EXTREME
AUTO BYTES

Catch AUTO EXTREME every Saturday, 4 PM on RPN 9 and log on to www.autoextreme.tv

Each week, a viewer's question related to cars and motoring gets answered on Auto Extreme. You can get a hard copy every Thursday in the Motoring section of the Philippine Daily Inquirer.

What is better, front wheel drive or rear wheel drive?
—*Carl Guevara of Cainta, Rizal*

THE ONE one most common among vehicles these days is front wheel drive. Why is it common? Because one big advantage of front wheel drive is reduced manufacturing cost. Front-wheel-drive systems are cheaper to manufacture and install because there's no driveshaft or rear axle housing to build, and overall, there are less parts needed. Reduced weight is another advantage, which improves the vehicle's acceleration, braking and fuel economy. And, placing the transmission up front leaves more room in the passenger compartment, since it eliminates the hump on the floor pan that covers the drive shaft. With no rear differential, you can also get more trunk space.

One other advantage of front wheel drive is the improved traction—especially in rain—since the weight of the engine and transaxle presses down right over the driven wheels. That's why, as cars have gotten lighter over the years to save fuel, more and more of them have turned to front-wheel drive.

Its most significant disadvantage: It's harder to work on. Because everything is jammed up front, the harder it is to reach certain things, like water pumps, cylinder-head bolts and sometimes even spark plugs.

As for rear-wheel drive, with some of the mechanical parts removed from the front and installed at the rear, vehicle balance and handling are much improved. Race car drivers may also prefer rear-wheel drive because when they accelerate, the weight of the car "shifts" back over the driven wheels, which is important when you're pushing the car to the limits of its grip.

But for the rest of us, there's not that much difference these days. In terms of performance, rear-wheel drive is probably a little better, because there's absolutely no torque steer. But most people would be hard pressed to tell the difference.

There is hope for North Diversion Road

FULL TANK

Al Mendoza

THAT was quite a revelation. The big city needs no less than $30 billion to cure its perennial traffic jam! That is the estimation of Bayani Fernando, head of the Metro Manila Development Authority.

Thirty billion pesos is already big. And we are talking here of dollars!

According to Fernando, the $30 billion will be spent to build expressways, primary arterial roads, secondary arterial roads and railways.

* * *

If we range the number of roads built during the last 20 years to the volume of vehicles rolled out from the assembly plants during the same period, you will see a big discrepancy.

Just consider: Metro Manila now has an estimated 435 vehicles per kilometer of road. That is nearly three times the 1978 vehicular density level of 149. And there was traffic already back then.

Fernando told our Gil C. Cabacungan Jr. that for Metro Manila to be freed of traffic, it should have 280 km of expressways, 800 km of primary arterial roads, 880 km of secondary arterial roads and 350 km of railways.

Fernando cited 1996 statistics in which there was already a need back then to build 190 km of new expressways, 590 km of primary roads, 700 km of secondary arterial roads and 300 km of urban railways. He said half of the $30 billion will fund urban railways such as the Light Rail Transit 1 to 6 and the proposed North Rail and MCX railway system.

* * *

I think Fernando is right. What the metropolis needs to unshackle itself from traffic snarls is a massive infrastructure to build roads, if not flyovers.

It can be done. With $30 billion at his disposal, it can be done. Give anybody that amount and there's no doubt he'll make Metro Manila the dream metropolis of the world.

I'm an optimist. And so, I hope Fernando gets it done——even as President Macapagal-Arroyo has announced she will not run next year. (Is Fernando's term coterminous with that of GMA?)

* * *

I doff my hat to GMA for her move to ban the importation of most types of used motor vehicles through her approval of the revised Motor Vehicle Development Program (MVDP).

Said the President: "The motor vehicle industry is a major component of the government's continuing industrial development program, which is tasked to enhance the capabilities of the Philippine motor vehicle manufacturing firms to be globally competitive producers of completely built-up units (CBUs) and their parts and components for the local and export markets."

The good thing about this is, the President made the decision before she announced her intention not to run for President next year.

"The motoring vehicle industry is a significant contributor to the country's economic output, employment, investments, exports and the development of small- and medium-scale parts," she said.

The ban covers vehicles (used cars, SUVs, passenger vans, pickups) with a gross weight of less than 2.5 tons. Those weighing between 2.5 tons and 6 tons will be restricted but no ban would be applied as the President had in mind the small businessmen, who comprise 99.5 percent of Philippine business who cannot usually afford prices of new vehicles.

* * *

There is still hope that the North Diversion Road will be rehabilitated after all, if Angel Ong, chief finance officer of the Benpres Holdings Corp., is to be believed. Ong has been quoted by our Doris C. Dumlao that the capital call for the project would be finally completed on Jan. 15 or thereabouts.

Ong said about $110 million has already been infused by stockholders into the project.

The Lopez Group has a 60 percent stake on the Manila North Tollways Corp. Group Egis of France has 10 percent and the state-run Philippine National Construction Corp. 10 percent.

The projected completion of the rehabilitation is next year, with the loan facility to be repaid over the next 12 years.

The total cost for the rehabilitation and expansion of the the North Expressway is $260 million.

One year is short and so, let's hope our favorite Diversion Road going up North will be finally completed next year.

* * *

What do I want to see in 2003?

- Mel Dizon becoming president of Mitsubishi Motor Philippines. If not, I'll recommend for his transfer to the main headquarters in Japan to become Mitsubishi's executive vice president. Next time I go to Tokyo, we'll drink sake and then ride the world's biggest ferris wheel by the Tokyo Bay.
- Vince Socco coming back to Toyota Motor Philippines and becoming its president for life. If Danny Isla doesn't get to be Vince's deputy, Danny should get an assignment in Toyota London. The next time I visit the Queen of London, Danny and I can sneak into Liverpool to see Penny Lane and The Cavern, where Beatlemania started.
- Arnel Doria teaching me Nippongo so that when he becomes Honda president, I'll tag along with him in his regular visits to Honda Tokyo—and become the official interpreter for Arnel's Angels: Tintin, Dansel and Min.
- Myrna Gonzales inviting me to an Isuzu party cum golf tournament, with Art and Timmy as my flightmates; red wine waiting at the clubhouse after the round, courtesy of Rommel Cortez.
- Albert Arcilla and Lyn Manalangsang scaling more heights at Volvo, even as I hope that Bonjin Bolinao continues to score more victories with her world-class manners.

Happy New Year!

* * *

QUOTE ME. For good luck, have your tank full. It's not yet late in the day.

MOTORING

Editor **Cesar D. Mangawang**

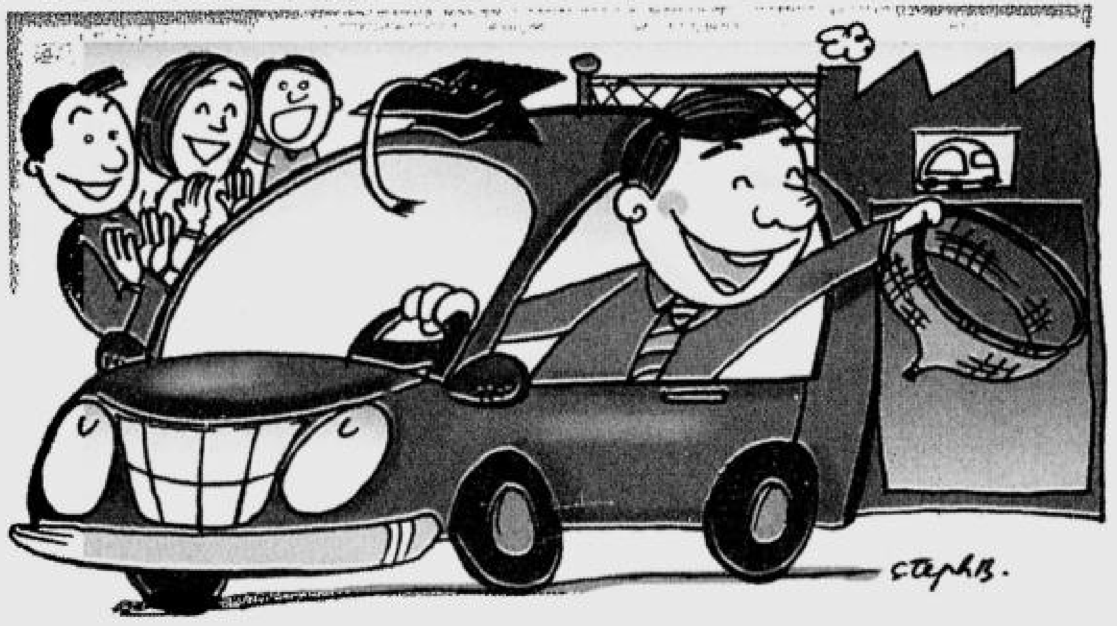
2003 is 'graduation time' for car manufacturers

By Tessa R. Salazar

FOR THE AUTO industry, it's "graduation time" this year.

The biggest thing that happened yesterday was the Asian Free Trade Agreement (Afta). The Afta would bring the duty rates of Asian products, including motor vehicles, among Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines, down to 5 percent within the region starting Jan. 1.

This means the import duty rates among the three Southeast Asian countries dropped to 5 percent since yesterday.



Time for independence

For the auto industry it's like graduating from college—a time to be "independent" from doting parents at home.

Ford Philippines president Henry Co told the Inquirer that the local auto industry is now facing outside competition on its own—free from government protection—as it competes head to head with Thailand and Indonesia.

He also added, however, that the Philippines would likewise be on the market offensive, as he views the expansion of the local market from being just domestic in scope into a regional one—a market of about a million vehicles.

Market size

He cited Thailand's market in 2001 was about 400,000; Indonesia's market, 350,000; and that of the Philippines, 80,000.

Said Co: "That's the size of the market this month. Of course, carmakers have different outlooks. You can talk to other carmakers and they won't have the same outlook. Some carmakers will refuse to recognize that. We, on the other hand, have been more aggressive."

Exports

Since March last year, Ford had already started exporting. This month it will be exporting 2,000 units of the Ford Escape to Thailand and Indonesia. Ford is scheduled to export 14,000 Escapes and Lynxes in 2003, on top of supplying 6,000 in the domestic market, bringing up Ford Philippines' volume to about 20,000 units for the whole 2003. And that's for its Escape and Lynx products alone.

"It is our hope that the other carmakers recognize the potential of the market of 1 million vehicles this year. They start to look at that and say, 'How can we participate in that market?' That should be our outlook," Co said.

Co said carmakers now have to ask themselves what they want the role of the Philippines to be. He analyzed that local carmakers just can't squeeze into the pickup market, as Thailand already has the distinction of collaring the largest segment of that market. In the AUV market, Co said Indonesia has six times the size of the Philippines' market for AUVs. In fact, Co said the country buys most of its AUV components from Indonesia.

"The Philippines has to find its role in the Asean regional market the same way that a new graduate from college goes out and finds a job," he said.

Co said government regulation plays an important role in the success of the Philippines in the region. One thing Ford Philippines is banking on, he said, is that toward the end of this year, the government has already instituted its export incentives to encourage local carmakers to be more aggressive in tapping the Asean market.

Healthy domestic base

Used vehicle imports erode the healthy domestic base, which is an essential ingredient for a strong export industry, Co argued.

Thailand, he cited, is the largest exporter of one-ton pickups in the world. It has strong domestic market for pickup. Indonesia, on the other hand, is the largest exporter of AUVs. It is also the largest single market of AUVs in the world. It exports AUVs to the Philippines, Taiwan and a number of South American countries.

Co said Thailand's large domestic base for pickups helps it become such a large exporter of pickups. The same is true for Indonesia's AUVs. Indonesia produces these vehicles in large volumes for its large domestic market so it can sell AUVs at lower prices outside. Malaysia, an Afta participant come 2008, already has its own arsenal for the "car wars." It already claims the largest market segment for the c-car (compact car) in Asean. In 2008 it is ready to supply this vehicle type to the rest of Asean.

If it acts fast, the Philippines could pull the rug from under Malaysia and grab the compact car market, Co said. "The Philippines potentially could, although it has a small domestic base for compact cars."

The big culprit

Local auto assemblers have five years to pull it off. Co urged auto assemblers to get their acts together and increase the domestic volume, and stamp out the proliferation of the used car market.

The country has some catching up to do. In 1996, the peak of the auto industry, sales volume stood at 160,000. By 1998, vehicle sales dropped to 80,000, and it has stayed at that level ever since.

"We didn't grow while the rest of the auto industry in the region all recovered. The big culprit is used cars coming into the country," he stressed. Co also hoped the government would act in the local auto industry's favor in the 2.5-ton cut-off issue. The government has allowed the importation of used 2.5-ton trucks.

Imported vehicles need to pass testing in Subic

ALL used motor vehicles imported through the Subic Freeport will have to undergo and pass testing and inspection for compliance with national law prior to release from the port and registration with the LTO.

This was jointly announced by Land Transportation Office chief and Transportation and Communication Assistant Secretary Roberto Lastimoso and Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority Chair Felicito Payumo who led guests in the official opening of the first LTO-accredited motor vehicle inspection station within the freeport.

Operated by the Vehicle Inspection and Testing Corp. (ViTEC), a pioneering private venture registered with the Board of Investments, the facility is considered the first-ever fully equipped motor vehicle inspection system (MVIS) facility in the Philippines.

"The facility answers the need for fast, efficient and thorough testing of motor vehicles for compliance with roadworthiness, safety and environmental standards set by the LTO and national laws like the Clean Air Act," Lastimoso said

For his part, Payumo thanked the private sector for investing in an MVIS facility within the freeport.

In a recent letter to Payumo, Lastimoso enjoined the SBMA to require "all imported used vehicles prior to release from port of entry to undergo and pass motor vehicle testing by the LTO or its duly accredited alternate inspection and testing center as a way of securing a special permit to travel and get initial registration with the LTO."

The respective obligations and responsibilities of the LTO and SBMA in regard to imported vehicles entering Subic are outlined in a memorandum of agreement signed in May last year between the two agencies.

Payumo emphasized that the SBMA will not issue a gate pass to any imported used vehicle until it has obtained and presented to the SBMA a motor vehicle inspection certificate (MVIC) issued by ViTEC or any other LTO-accredited testing station.

Vehicles will run through a series of above-chassis and under-chassis inspection at the plant's state-of-the-art facilities. Among these are tests for smoke emission and substance leaks as well as dynamic alignment, engine, speedometer and brake performance. Vehicles that pass the tests will then be issued their certificates of compliance.

Fuel economy at a time of war

ON THE ROAD

Aida Sevilla Mendoza

REMEMBER the small hybrid car that the visiting CEO of Japan's biggest car manufacturer, Toyota Motor Corp., presented as a gift to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo last year? As the United States girds for war in Iraq next month and the price of petroleum soars, that subcompact, the Toyota Prius, and other hybrid motor vehicles may well play an increasingly vital role in the campaign to reduce dependence on oil from the Middle East.

This is because of the fuel economy of the Prius, which runs on a combination of gasoline and electric power. It has an electric motor that is used to pull away and to drive at low speeds. When the car speeds up to around 24 to 32 kilometers per hour, the internal combustion engine kicks in, so the Prius is most fuel-efficient (around 19 km per liter) in city driving where there is frequent acceleration and braking. Since the electric motor is charged by the gasoline engine, it does not need to be plugged in. During deceleration and downhill driving, the electric motor becomes a generator that also recharges the battery and increases fuel economy.

The Prius 4-door, 5-seater sedan, introduced by Toyota in 1997, was the world's first mass-produced and commercially marketed hybrid vehicle. Aside from Japan, Europe and North America (about 37,000 sold in the US as of last November), it is now available in Hong Kong, Singapore and Australia. Toyota, which also has a hybrid Estima 2.4-liter, 4-wheel-drive minivan and a Crown Royal Hybrid luxury sedan, hopes to sell 300,000 hybrid vehicles annually by 2005.

New hybrid model

Toyota may unveil a new hybrid model at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit this month, possibly a hybrid version of the Highlander sport utility vehicle. But Toyota is not the only carmaker into hybrids. Honda Motor Co. has been selling its two-door hybrid Insight since 1999 and last year began selling a hybrid Civic in the US. DaimlerChrysler plans to sell a hybrid version of its Dodge Ram pickup truck this year while Ford Motor Co. is coming out with a hybrid Escape compact SUV before the year ends.

The Toyota Prius is becoming the car of choice for Americans who want to taunt Saddam Hussein, the oil sheiks and neighbors who drive big, gas-guzzling SUVs just to go to the supermarket. Prius owners include environmentally concerned Hollywood stars such as Leonardo DiCaprio, Cameron Diaz and Ted Danson as well as Republican county sheriffs and bank executives eager to support, following the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, President Bush's war effort in Iraq by reducing dependence on oil imports. In short, owning a Prius (price: about US$4,500 more than a Corolla) has become both an anti-SUV and political statement.

Meanwhile, the Bush administration wants automakers to increase the average fuel economy of light trucks—SUVs, pickups and minivans—to 9.34 km per liter by the 2007 model year from the present 8.71 km per liter. (Currently, cars are required to average 11.6 km per liter.) Booming sales of SUVs have reduced the fuel economy of the average vehicle in the US to its lowest point in two decades, thereby contributing to the country's growing dependence on imported oil.

SUV sales

Auto manufacturers whose profitability has been boosted by SUV sales have long opposed proposals to improve fuel economy. For instance, when Senators John McCain and John Kerry co-sponsored a proposal to require a 50 percent increase in fuel economy for light trucks and cars over 12 years, it was roundly defeated. Political pundits say that the lobbying might of the auto industry and its labor unions ensured the proposal's defeat.

No wonder any proposed laws that would adversely affect SUVs are vigorously opposed. In the 1990s, SUVs became the key product line in the auto industry as their profitability helped revive the economy of the upper Midwest states. Ford Motor Co. reportedly earns a $10,000 profit for every Expedition sold.

Perhaps to preempt any more fuel-efficiency proposals, Ford, followed by General Motors and DaimlerChrysler, pledged a 25 percent improvement in the fuel economy of its SUVs by 2005. And guess what? The White House's proposal requiring automakers to improve the fuel efficiency of light trucks by 1.5 miles per gallon by 2007 is actually less than what the industry is already doing. *(With reports from The New York Times)*

* * *

TODAY'S BUMPER STICKER: A clone is a person two.

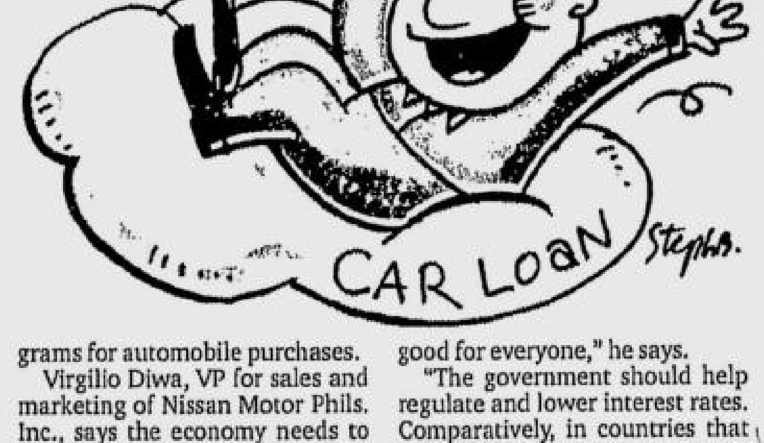
* * *

(E-mail comments to asevilla@inquirer.com.ph)

WISH LIST, FORECAST FOR 2003

Auto manufacturers want more soft loans for car buyers

By Tessa R. Salazar



BANKS to offer attractive and affordable loan scheme for vehicle buyers; the Philippines to rethink its auto industry role in Asia; the government to fast track export incentives.

These just some of what automakers believe should be on every New Year's resolution list of their concerned sectors.

Looking at their crystal ball bearings, forecasts include the continuing dominance of commercial vehicle sales (right now it stands at 70 percent of the total), and AUVs being the banner product of the industry. The Asean Free Trade Agreement (Afta) with Thailand and Indonesia will stimulate the market, but auctioned used vehicles will stunt the country's growth in the auto industry.

Consumer lending

To stimulate the domestic market for vehicles, carmakers believe that banks should be more aggressive in their lending programs for automobile purchases.

Virgilio Diwa, VP for sales and marketing of Nissan Motor Phils. Inc., says the economy needs to be primed, and one way of doing that is to increase consumer lending.

"Lower down payment requirements will be a great boost to the whole automotive industry and will greatly stimulate sales of brand-new vehicles, which is good for everyone," he says.

"The government should help regulate and lower interest rates. Comparatively, in countries that enjoy a healthy domestic economy like Thailand, average interest rate on borrowing for automotive purchases is about 3 percent compared to the Philippines' 12 percent," he adds.

Toyota Motors Philippines' media relations officer Ariel de Jesus wishes for the Philippines to finally become a global automotive hub in Asia rather than a dumping ground of used vehicles.

Fighting pollution

Toyota vehicle makers also want a stronger resolve from the government as well as the automotive industry to fight pollution. De Jesus also urges for a solution to Metro Manila's worsening traffic management problem.

Nissan hopes alternative fuels would make its way in the country to help stop the worsening pollution. Nissan, Diwa says, has been engaged in such an endeavor, developing many environment-friendly models in Japan such as the AD wagons and vans powered by compressed natural gas. He also cites the Hypermini and the electric-powered and hybrid engines that have been developed and tested by Nissan Motor Limited.

Isuzu Philippines Corp. executive vice president Hiroshi Ishino wishes for a more stable peso, for Isuzu to be the No. 1 commercial vehicle brand in 2003 (it was, but briefly, in November 2002), and for the total auto market to improve by at least 5 percent.

General Motors, Ford Philippines, and Honda Cars Philippines Inc.'s fervent wishes include the approval and implementation of the new excise tax system.

AUVs, A-OK

Diwa sees total vehicle demand will still tilt in favor of AUVs, "because of the usability of these vehicles as still being the highest priority of those who purchase them. Since NMPI is a passenger car and recreational vehicle assembler, we will not enjoy the robust sales as those companies who sell AUVs."

Says Diwa: "Nissan's Serena performed adequately in the van segment, selling nearly 1,000 units in its first year. This was some 30 percent more than our target. It topped its particular class—the front wheel drive van segment—where it remained unbeaten since it was introduced in April 2002."

Diwa sees the demand for passenger cars to remain about the same as it did in 2002.

"NMPI's 2002 performance was well within our expectations based on current business conditions," he says.

If the right price-product mix is achieved, it would be possible for small SUVs to make its own waves.

GM predicts the auto industry would sell 95,000 units in 2003, an 11-percent increase from 2002.

Honda Philippines thinks the Afta, which would be effective Jan. 1, would pave the way for a vibrant exchange of CBUs among Asean countries, stimulating the local market, at least for the time being.

But then, it sees the widespread sale of imported used passenger cars and light commercial vehicles to negate the slight recovery observed in the last quarter of 2002.

For feedback, text us at (0919)880-33-54 or email us at pr_lifestyle@inquirer.com.ph

LIFESTYLE

Editor **Chelo Banal-Formoso**

A 'waray' makes it big in Manila

In many households, Tita Paring's version of the 'suman latik' has become a mainstay of the holidays

STORY ON PAGE C2

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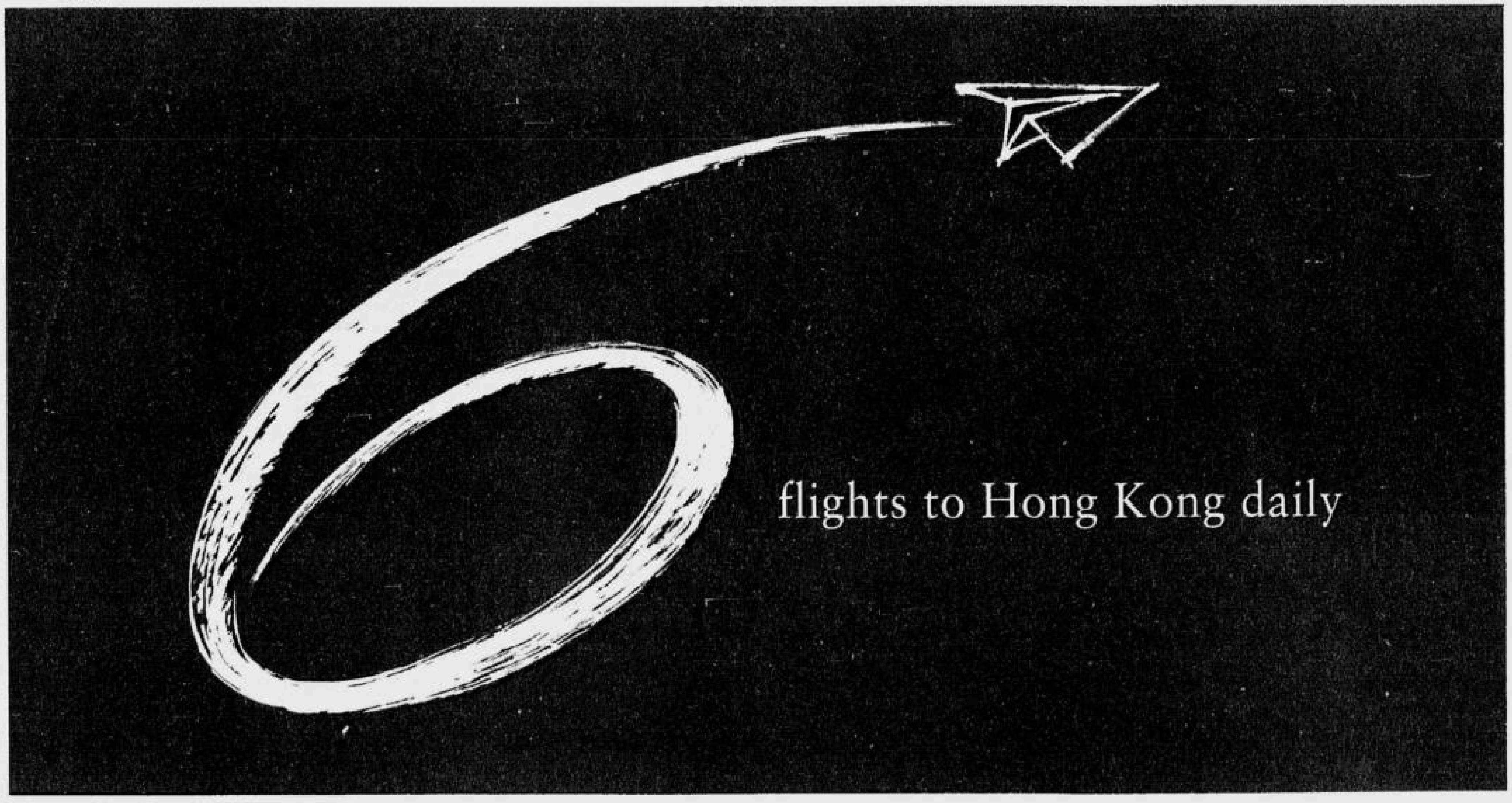

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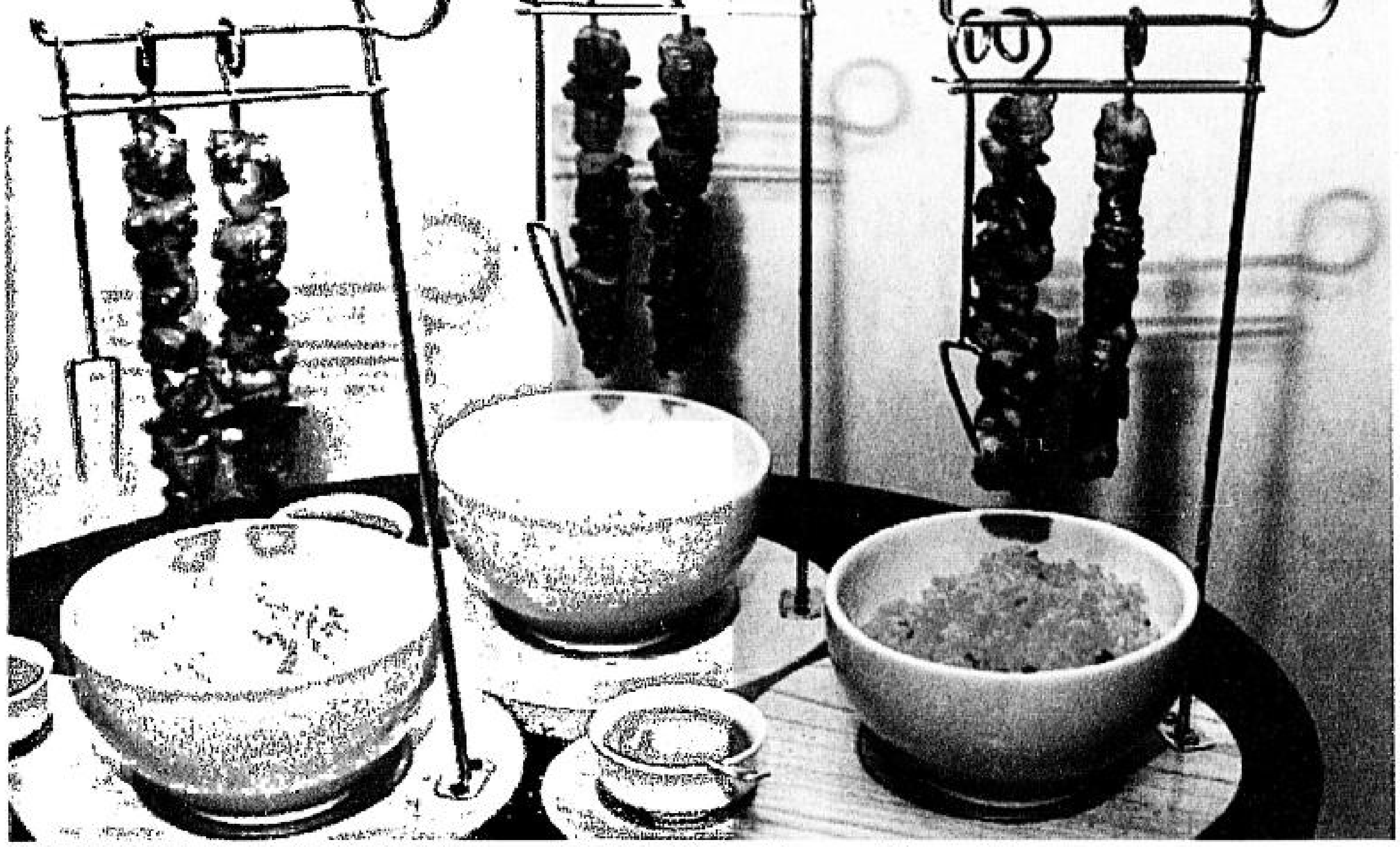
The thrill of the grill

Text by Leah Salterio
Photos by Roger Carpio

No-borders cuisine, mostly easy-to-order comfort food like barbecues, is what Azzurro-Spargo serves


THE BARBECUES are uniquely served hanging in especially made prongs and skewers with bowls of rice.

THREE years after successfully running Azzurro, which serves contemporary Mediterranean fare, restaurateur Sheila Romero developed her own concept for serving barbecues in a different way.

Last May at SM Megamall's Megastrip B, Sheila opened Azzurro-Spargo, a no-borders cuisine that takes grilling to the next level. With chef Philip Golding, who is also her partner in Azzurro, Romero renovated the Azzurro branch at Megastrip B to house Spargo.

"We had been thinking of what kind of food would appeal to Megamall clients," Romero says. "We want to give them value for money, nothing fancy. Azzurro-Spargo (tel. 687-3281) is comfort food, something that is easy to order."

The barbecues are uniquely served hanging in especially made prongs and skewers. Two skewers of barbecue plus a bowl of rice, which two persons can share, are priced at P155. Spargo also serves plated barbecues of chicken or beef tenderloin, with different sauces to choose from.

Bestseller

The bestseller in the menu is Ramayana's Pride, an Indian dish of lamb, tomatoes, dijonaise and buttered rice all for only P245.

Another popular item is the Green Meets Grill, a mixed Cajun spiced mushroom, zucchini, eggplant, peppers and onion, with couscous and aioli dressing, for only P120.

For customers who don't want rice, there's the cobble loaf bread that goes with the barbecues. For thirst-quencher, there's the Pandan Slush.

"The concept of Spargo is very open-ended," Golding shares. Regular Azzurro customers like Miriam Quiambao and Hans Montenegro, with broadcaster Mike Toledo who all love Azzurro's food, have also become partners in Spargo.

Daily buffet

The restaurant recently introduced its daily lunch buffet. For only P350, the choices include Paella, Salad, Grilled Chicken, Pasta Puttanesca, Fisherman's Pie (a medley of salmon, squid and shrimp) and Crème Brulée for dessert.

"The buffet food is nothing fancy," Romero insists. "You can eat everything on the tray. It's our way of thanking our customers for patronizing Azzurro for a year now.."

The location outside the mall is a big advantage for Azzurro-Spargo, according to Romero. Parking in a mall is not a problem. In front of the restaurant are parking spaces. There is also valet service.

Romero and Golding are both attentive to details. The chef refuses to scrimp when it comes to ingredients. "We buy quality stuff," he notes. "It may cost us a little bit more, but the end result is better. We serve quality food. And with that, we ensure that all the outlets follow."

The supervision and management extend even to the restaurant staff.

"Our servers know the dishes and what kind of wine goes with the food," Golding adds. "We push a lot when it comes to the front house. We make sure that the service is good."

To keep up with competition, the chef updates the Azzurro-Spargo menu every month to include new entrees.

The restaurant also caters for private functions, with as many as 1,400 people. Spargo boasts of Asian specialties, while Azzurro also serves Indian and Japanese food, on top of its Mediterranean menu.

Romero and Golding have opened Azzurro-Spargo for franchising at P950,000, which includes mechanical, architectural, plumbing, kitchen outlay, the use of the name, staff training and kitchen manuals.

Theme nights

In October, Sheila started the theme nights every Thursday at Azzurro-Spargo at SM Megamall, with the airing of the top-rating and award-winning TV series, "The Sopranos" for "Mobster Nights."

"We want to develop a regular Thursday group that will come to the restaurant to watch the series," Romero says. "You have to be creative and think of new things all the time."

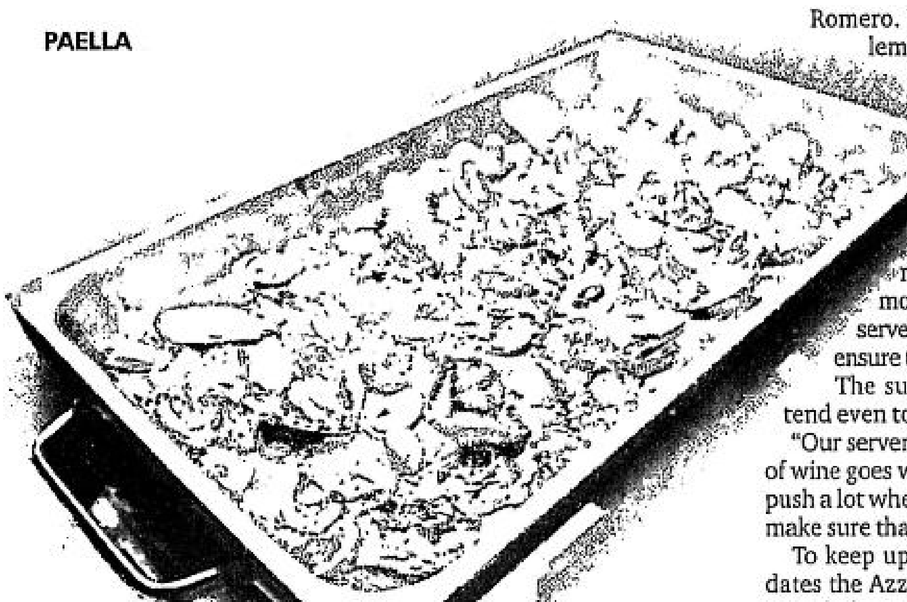
While watching "The Sopranos," diners can feast on Azzurro-Spargo's world barbecues. The restaurant also offers a wine-all-you-can promo. At the Megamall branch, it's P265 for standard wine selections and P365 for premium wine, from 3-7 p.m. and from 10 p.m. onward.

"Mobster Nights" are supported by Johnny Walker Black, which is why it carries the theme, "Be who you want to be in black." Special prizes are given to those who come in their best costumes.

On Wednesdays, Azzurro-Spargo features guest DJs who play music from the '70s to the '90s, starting at 10 p.m.

Azzurro-Spargo has many regular showbiz customers, including Pops Fernandez, Kris Aquino, Boy Abunda, Diether Ocampo, Mark Gil, Piolo Pascual and Martin Nievera.

PAELLA



AZZURRO-SPARGO'S chic interiors

PARTNERS Sheila Romero and chef Philip Golding

A 'waray' makes it big in Manila

Text by Vangie Baga-Reyes
Photos by Betoy Johnson

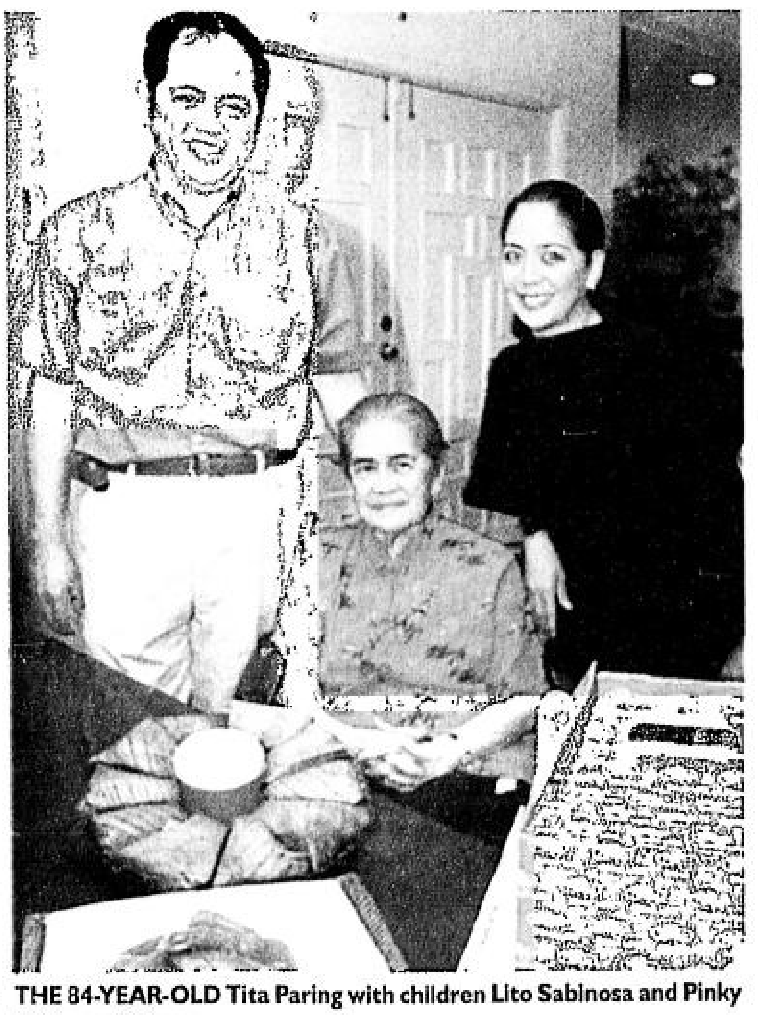
SINCE Tita Paring's *suman latik* became commercially available over 13 years ago with the opening of Tita Paring's first outlet at Glori Supermarket, more and more households have included her native rice cake in their holiday or special occasion buffets.

In these households, the *suman latik* has become as much a tradition as *hamon* and *queso de bola* during *media noche*.

Amparo Cuna Sabinosa, also known as Tita Paring to many people, is now 84 years old. She started making *suman latik* back in her teens, having learned it, as the eldest in a brood of seven kids, from her mom. Initially, her customers consisted of relatives and friends.

The business is now managed by one of her children, Lito Sabinosa, but Tita Paring still ensures the consistency of the taste and the quality of the products. "Often, if we have new suppliers, like for the *malagkit*, I still have to taste it," she says.

Tita Paring's *suman latik* (*suman sa lihiya* for Tagalogs) is sweet and tender, made of glutinous rice mixed with sugar and wrapped in banana leaves with a triangular shape. What makes it rise above other *suman* is the thick, sweet sauce or *latik*, which is made of coconut and brown sugar poured lavishly on the unwrapped rice cake.


THE 84-YEAR-OLD Tita Paring with children Lito Sabinosa and Pinky Sabinosa-Nelson

Samar export

The original recipe for this sticky rice cake came from Catbalogan, Samar, where hailed Tita Paring's Waray mother, Consuelo Cuna. "You soak the *malagkit* in water and precook it [by adding] lye and a little salt until it turns yellow. It is then transferred to a large basin, and wrapped in banana leaves. The wrapped pieces are put in a large pan and steamed for two to three hours," explained Tita Paring.

Over the years, Tita Paring has given the *suman* her own distinctive touch to give it and its sauce a unique taste. "The secret is in the quality of ingredients that we use," she said. "We use only first-class *malagkit*, top-grade sugar and other things."

Lito added: "We may be commercially available but we are not 'commercial' when it comes to quality and taste. We don't scrimp on our ingredients. We don't shortchange our clients. The prices may go up but the quality will not change."

Tita Paring's *suman* has such a distinctive taste that even people from Catbalogan, source of the original recipe, order it.

Big demand

Since they opened their first outlet in 1989, the *suman* has always been in big demand, especially during the holidays, peaking in the mid-'90s at about 150,000 pieces on Christmas. The economic crisis has reduced their sales. Tita Paring recalled that before the Japanese occupation, she would sell her *suman* at P20 per hundred pieces. Now they cost P30 a piece.

These days, the family makes about a thousand pieces a day, which triples during the holidays.

But, despite the difficulties, Tita Paring's *suman* has gone global. Almost 40 percent of her customers are *balikbayan*, as her *suman latik* has become a favorite *pasalubong* abroad. "We get a lot of orders every time there's an influx of *balikbayans*," says Lito. Aside from December, the family also does good business in January when many *balikbayans* place their order.

The *suman* can last for three days without refrigeration, and 10-14 days, if kept in the freezer. If frozen, it will last for six months. Unlike other *suman* that hardens when stored in the refrigerator, Tita Paring's *suman* remains soft and good.

The *suman* is now available at Glori Supermarket in Araneta Ave., SM Centerpoint foodcourt, SM Megamall foodcourt, Greenhills Shoppesville, Landmark Supermarket, Lourdes-QC and Eunilaine Foodmart. Some branches also sell other *kakanin*, such as *currucud* (*suman sa gata* or *suman sa ibos*), *ira-id* (*kamoteng-kahoy* with *buko* shreds), *biko*, *leche flan*, *palitaw*, *sapin-sapin*, *maja blanca* and *cuchinta*.

Tita Paring's suman may be ordered at 166 Wayan St., Brgy. Masambong, QC. Call 364-7392/7266.

E-mail the author at vbaga@inquirer.com.ph

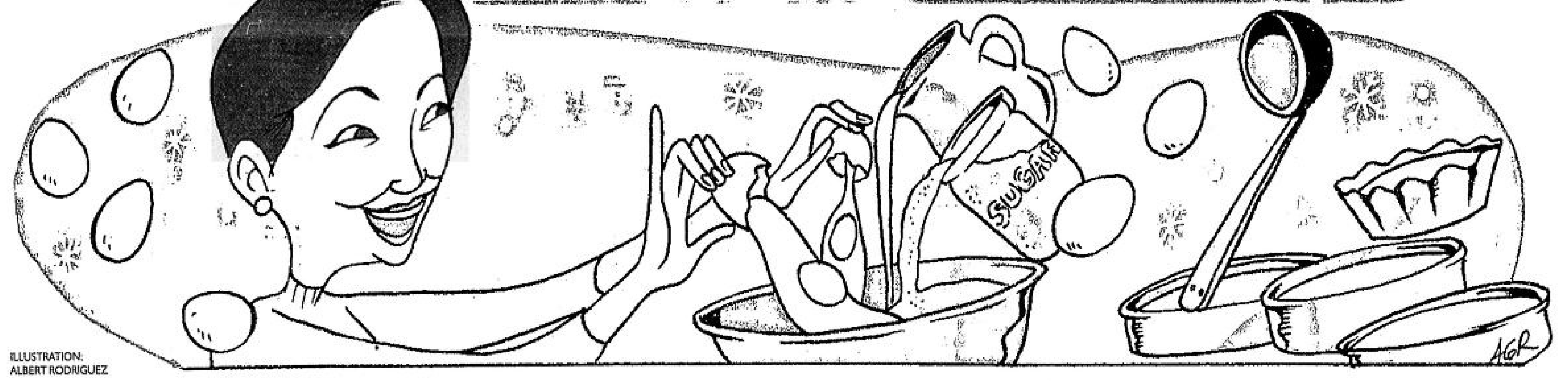


ILLUSTRATION: ALBERT RODRIGUEZ

Heavenly desserts, or making 'tocino' from chicken eggs

THE JOYFUL COOK

Felice Prudente Sta. Maria

CHRISTMAS joy packed the refrigerator, wine cooler and cupboards with provisions to last through Pascua del Resurrecion (Easter). TJC loved the native home-made gifts—thin *nipa* sugar cakes packed in dry leaves, Mason jars of *sayote* and quail egg pickles, extra thick mango *jalea*, personal bottles of *dulce leche* to eat by the spoonful—and the organic brown rice and dark coffee beans from hinterlands. She stored away heady fruitcakes made from guarded family recipes, chestnuts in armagnac-flavored syrup, and *pili turron* delicately threaded with invisible *dayap* rind. Reciprocity was the rule. TJC had given friends Leche Flan and Tocino del Cielo home-made "great-grandmother's way."

Fresh eggs

"Both recipes require the best eggs," TJC told Saint Sandok.

"You still use the egg-in-water float test, I've noticed. It used to annoy and amuse egg vendors during Peacetime. Imagine having to wait patiently as madam observed her cook drop each potential purchase into a bucket of water," he replied.

"Well, everyone wants to get their money's worth. Soggy yolks lead to kitchen disasters," countered TJC. "Yolks hold custards together. If an egg sinks, it's past its prime. Sinking eggs have runny yolks. As eggs age, they lose air through porous shells; old centers break easily, having absorbed egg-white water. A custard's beautiful golden color also depends on good yolks; unfortunately, some contemporary feeds produce pale ones. I prefer free-range chickens."

"Once upon a time, all fowl roamed free. Controversial chemical fertilizers and hormone-enhanced feeds had not yet been invented," Saint Sandok observed.

"Right indeed," said the Cook. "Some old recipes include duck egg. I doubt if it was due to supposed aphrodisiac powers suggested in books like the Lucayos Cookbook of 1600, but more for duck's yolk's brilliant color."

Each tradition of making 'leche flan' attempts to replicate a dessert introduced side by side with Christian feasting

'Flan de leche'

"I wonder how many Filipinos realize that 'Leche Flan' is Filipinized Spanish," Sandok interrupted. "*Leche* and *flan* are both nouns. Proper Spanish would keep *flan* a noun and turn *leche* descriptive. It would also put the adjective after the noun. It's in English where adjectives often precede nouns. The dessert ought to be Flan de Leche or Flan Lechoso, not Leche Flan."

"Spanish cookbooks simply refer to *flan*. Custards need milk, so perhaps it is unnecessary to emphasize the ingredient," TJC added. "There are recipes for Flan de Café, Flan de Naranja or Flan de Cacao indicating the custard's special flavor, but nothing for Flan de Leche. I wish I could find my copy of James Michener's novel, "Iberia." It has the most wonderful description of how important *flan* is to the Spanish. There is an entire chapter devoted to El Gran Flanero who makes *flan* patronized by celebrity bullfighters, politicians and commoners alike. For some, his *flan* is even a talisman.

"Philippine *flan* distinguishes itself from all other custards in its sugar to yolk ratio; that's what makes it Filipino. By trying to make Leche Flan other than what it really is, we are altering the tradition. Leche Flan has more eggs and sugar than the British custard and the French crème brulee. Yolks coagulate slower as sugar is added. The proportion is what gives Philippine *flan* its special texture," she explained.

"Tradition itself, however, has its variations," said Saint Sandok. "I know of an heirloom recipe for Leche Flan that needs the yolks from 12 chicken eggs and one duck egg, one half-shell of white sugar for each yolk used, and carabao milk. Cows are not native to the Philippines. Carabao milk is creamier than cow milk, and that affects *flan* chemistry. Only when pasteurizing and canning were discovered could cow milk figure in local recipes. I remember that one of the first brands popular in Manila was "Oso"—Spanish for Bear Brand. Cow *leche* is exotic in "*carabao-gatas*" country. Maybe that's why it's important to state custard from *leche* in Philippine setting."

"Some families still use carabao milk, chicken eggs and brown sugar for custard. Instead of caramelizing white sugar, slightly burnt brown sugar syrup is substituted. There are even recipes that substitute coconut milk and *panocha*. White sugar existed in the late 19th century but was not common until the 20th," TJC noted.

"There are differing traditions of Leche Flan. Each attempts to replicate a dessert introduced side by side with Christian feasting. When eggs were not allowed during Lent, custards and cakes served on Easter Sunday were really welcome," she added.

Mary's bath

"Nowadays, we fail to appreciate the technological discoveries that went into creating our food heritage," Saint Sandok ventured. "We could not have *flan* if we did not have the *baño maria*. The idea of sitting one container inside another filled with water in an oven or atop a stove was invented by an Italian female chemist named Maria. The *bain marie* allows slow, even cooking of delicate milk and eggs that burn quickly. The best is to sit Mary's bath inside an oven where there is heat all around the tub.

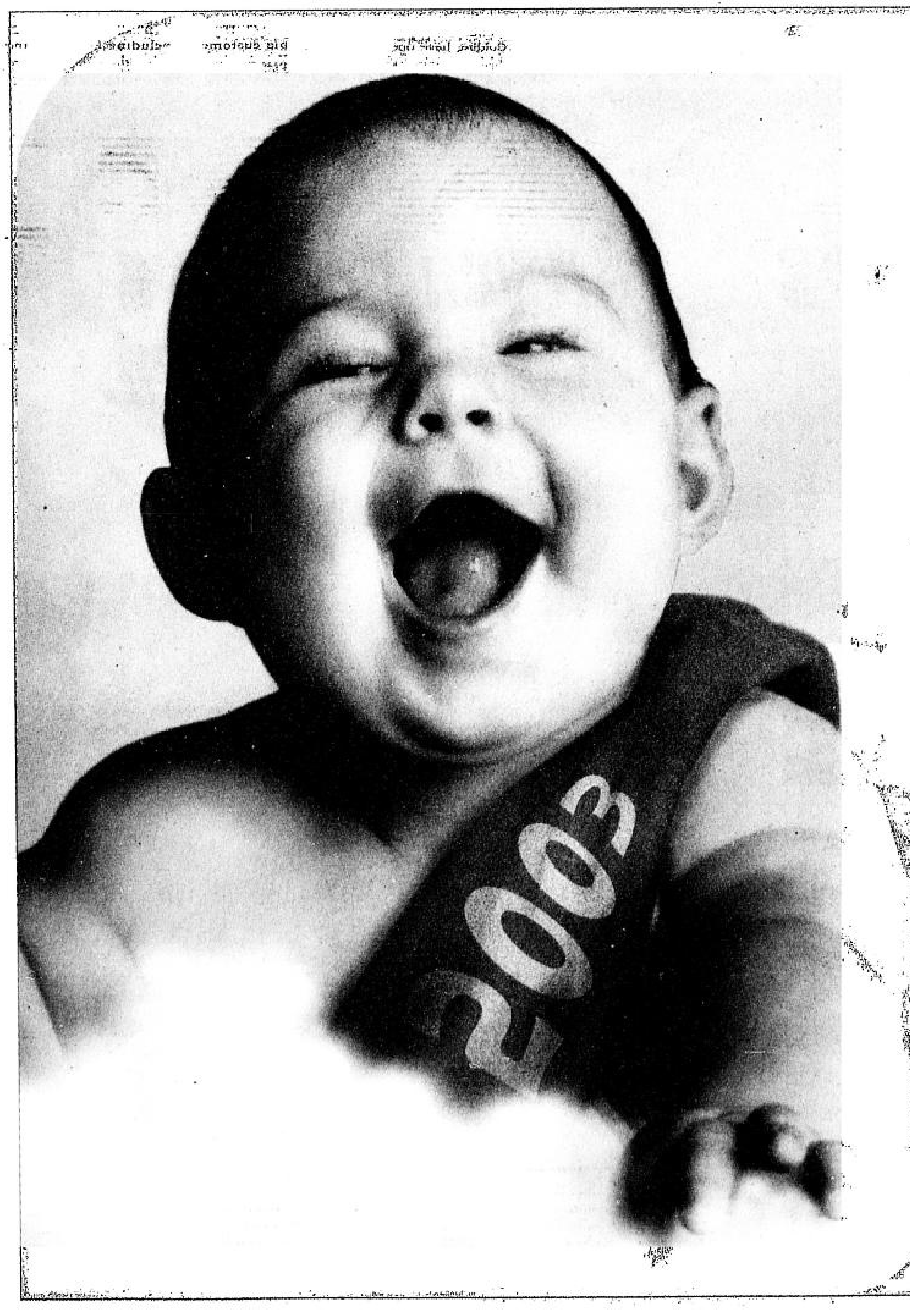
A variation is the double boiler, where one pot sits in a larger pot placed directly over the stove. The bottom of the small pot does not come into contact with the bottom of the large pot and is gently heated in a water bath. Both inventions allow gentle cooking, especially in days when there were no knobs to control the fire's heat.

"One delicious result of Mary's hot tub is Tocino del Cielo— morsels of heavenly sweetness. In English, they would be called Pigs or Bacon of Heaven. Indeed, enjoyment of Tocino del Cielo is like biting into the thick fat of a perfect roasted pig. Every Tocino del Cielo has more yolk per square millimeter than Leche Flan! It's the cholesterolic climax of desserts!" said Saint Sandok, absolutely enthralled.

"I still think the name is odd," TJC commented. "Why equate pigs and bacon with a delicate sweet? It doesn't seem right."

"Remember that religion alone dictated diet once upon a time. Christians have been allowed to eat pork while believers of some other religions have been forbidden. What one ate proved one's faith; so eating pork was fashionably Christian," he reminded. "Thank heaven that medical and nutritional sciences have stepped into the kitchen. I bet one too many chicken-egg 'tocino' has been threatening Saint Peter's domain with population explosion ever since the sweet was first cooked," he added with a chuckle.

Next: Saint Sandok's memories from travels in the 1800s



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January 11 (Saturday) 2:00 p.m.-5:30 p.m. P1,500 BROWNIES & BARS by: Heny Sison, *Chewy Moist Brownies, Carrot Cake Bars with Cream Cheese Icing, Lemon Cheesecake Bars, Brownies with Caramel Center and Butterscotch Bars.

January 18 (Saturday) 9:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m. P2,500 PIZZA CLASS WORKSHOP by: Chef Giorgio Bucciarelli, Master Pizzaiolo & Barista, Food Consultant of various Italian restaurants all over Metro Manila, graduated at Culinary institute. Milan Italy *In this class you will learn the history, concept and design of pizza making. Learn how to make pizza dough, tomato sauce base, white sauce base, preparation, setting up a pizza counter, know the ingredients and toppings. **Recipes:** Margherita, Napoli Classica, 4 Formaggi, Pizza Vegetariana, La Gibiana, Piccantina, 4 Stagioni, Calzone & Frutti de Mare. **Demonstration with student participation.**

January 20 (Monday) 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. P1,700 BURGERS & STEAKS by: Chef Jane Paredes, Food Consultant, co-owner Café Cornucopia, trained at the Culinary Institute of America, Hyde Park New York and Peter Kump's New York Cooking School.

Burgers: Italian Burger, Beef Tex Mex Burger, Chicken Burger and Traditional Beef Burger
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January 22 (Wednesday) 9:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m. P2,500 FRESH PASTA by: Chef Giorgio Bucciarelli * There is simply no comparison between homemade hand-formed pasta and the store bought stuff. Homemade is not only tastier but a lot easier to make than you think. Learn how to make pasta egg dough, green spinach dough, black pasta dough, different kind of pastas: lasagna, green lasagna, ravioli, tortellini, cannelloni, fettuccine: green and black, stuffing's for ravioli, tortellini and cannelloni. Sauces for lasagna, tortellini, ravioli & cannelloni. **Recipes:** Lasagna alla Bolognese, Lasagna al 4 Formaggi, Lasagna al Pesto, Cannelloni alla Ricotta and Spinaci, Ravioli alla Boscaiola al Burro e Salvia, Tortellini al 4 Formaggi, alla Panna Prosciutto e Funghi, Green Fettuccine alla Montanara, Black Fettuccine al Frutti de Mare. **Demonstration with student participation.**

January 27 (Monday) 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. P1,500 SPECIAL COURSE ON COOKIES by: Heny Sison, * Chocolate Chip Cookies, Jam Thumbprint, Peanut Butter, Cookies, Lemon Bars, Chocolate Cups, Oatmeal and Chocolate Crinkles.

January 27 (Monday) 2:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m. P1,500 COFFEE! COFFEE! COFFEE! by: Aileen Anastacio, owner of C'est Si Bon and Goodies N' Sweets, graduate of culinary at the California Culinary Academy *If you are planning to open a coffee shop this course is for you. Learn the four fundamentals of coffee brewing, home espresso, guide to steaming & foaming. **Recipes:** Caffé Mocha, Caffé Americano, Caffé Latte, Cappuccino, Espresso Macchiato and Espresso con Panna. Make fun toppings and garnishes and master the art of coffee making.

January 28 (Tuesday) 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. P1,500 DESSERT I by: Jill Sandique, Chef / Food Consultant & Food Stylist, Blue Ribbon graduate of Peter Kump's New York Cooking School. * Chocolate Almond Meringue Cake, Chocolate Crumb Cake Carrot Apple Cake, Caramel Mousse, Mango Charlotte Walnut Torte with Butterscotch Frosting.

January 29 (Wednesday) 9:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m. P1,500 CAKE ART SPECIALTIES I by: Jill Sandique, *Big Jacks, Mango Bars, Glazed Dark Chocolate Cake with Caramel Sauce, Pavlova, Pecan Pie Bars and Chocolate Silk

January 29 (Wednesday) 1:30 p.m.-5:30 p.m. P1,500 JAPANESE COOKING I (All Time Favorite Japanese Recipes) by: Chef Koichi Kondo, licensed cook from Ehime, Japan and food consultant to various Japanese restaurants * Miso Soup, Tempura, Nimono, Yakimono, California Maki, Chilled Soba, Noodles with Nori, Skewered Dumplings with Brown Sauce.

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Consumers bewail foul practices at hotels

THE CONSUMER

Marietta Velasco Giron

SOMETHING has to be done at the front desk level of local hotels. Clerks and managers should be trained to woo tourists, not to drive them away. Disgruntled tourists have a way of spreading the bad news, and through the Internet, the effect can circulate far and wide, ad infinitum.

Take for example, a complaint we received several months ago about the front liners of Hotel Supreme in Baguio City. We received the latest version of this complaint which readers can access by writing to the complainant at e-mail address jvanommen@adb.org

Johannes van Ommen said that he booked two rooms for three nights in Hotel Supreme during the Christmas holidays last year. Accordingly, the agent made the usual pre-payment to guarantee the booking reservation. An agreement was signed containing hotel conditions, rules and regulations, etc.

Van Ommen and his family checked in as scheduled. However, for some reasons, they decided to cut their stay to one day. He asked the front desk to arrange for a refund of the amount that had been pre-paid. According to him, he offered to pay a reasonable amount that would cover administrative and cancellation costs.

He wrote to us: "The front desk officer bluntly said the hotel had a no-refund policy on pre-paid booking. I said I was not aware of such policy. It was not mentioned whatsoever in the agreement with the travel agency... The officer refused to further entertain my request. I was embarrassed and felt I was looked down upon."

The amount in question added up to P6,000 but as Van Ommen explained, "The amount is only secondary to the issue. I felt deprived of my right to be informed (about the hotel policy and regulation) and was further deprived of the appropriate professional service. As of this writing (Dec. 12), I have not received an explanation from the hotel about their verbally-imposed no-refund policy."

Van Ommen is a Dutch national who lives with his family in Quezon City. Before he joined the Asian Development Bank, he was with the Netherlands Development Organization and the Delegation of the European Commission in the Philippines.

Booking error

Dr. Josef de Ubaldo cannot get over the most embarrassing experience of his life. He reserved a room at the New World Renaissance Hotel for a guest lecturer at a symposium in Manila. However, when the guest checked in at the hotel last Nov. 27, no room was available for him and his companions. According to the front desk clerks, the reservation made by De Ubaldo was for Oct. 27 and it was already Nov. 27.

De Ubaldo protested," How could I book them on the day I made the reservation when I knew they were arriving one month later? I was utterly humiliated to have this happen to a well-respected figure who would be a guest lecturer at a symposium in December." The visiting lecturer was Dr. Jan Hakimulder, Chancellor of Inter-Cultural Open University of Netherlands and an ambassador for peace of the International Association of Educators for World Peace. De Ubaldo is president of the Philippine Federation of Natural Health and Environment Friendly Organization and is national chancellor of the International Association of Educators for World Peace.

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Atab Rivera, resident manager of New World Renaissance Hotel officially apologized to De Ubaldo. He further explained, "After conducting an investigation, we found out that the original reservation of Dr. Hakimulder was for Oct. 27 with confirmation No. 460857. When he checked in last Nov. 27, his booking was no longer in the system... Nevertheless, as a procedure, if a guest requires room accommodation even without reservation, we definitely provide (room). Unfortunately, the hotel was fully booked on that date."

Other consumer complaints

Elaine Chua wants to know why her son's Globe telecard indicates an error every time the card value totals P90. She writes, "I called the number on the screen and got the cue that there was nothing wrong and that the card should only be wiped with alcohol, and (it) should be okay for use. I followed the instruction but the error persisted. I complained to a business center but was told that the center cannot be held responsible for the error and therefore cannot change the card nor refund money."

From James S. Co of Meralco-Pasig Extension branch: "Last April, I bought a computer. It had a one-year warranty. By October, we found out that the CD-ROM was defective. It was changed to an upgraded version, for which I paid an additional P500. On Dec. 22, the CD-ROM failed to work again. It was pulled out but we were told that the replacement is not covered by the PC's warranty beyond its expiration date."

E-mail the author at mgiron@i-manila.com.ph

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